

100-Minutes

with the

Qur'an

Contents

Chapter	Page No
Preface	iii
1. The Opening	3
2. Provenance of the Qur'an	4
3. In the Beginning	6
4. The Creation of Adam and Eve (Adam and Hawwa)	7
5. The Two Sons of Adam	9
6. Noah (Nuh)	10
7. Hud	12
8. Salih	13
9. Abraham (Ibrahim)	15
10. Lot (Lut)	19
11. Joseph (Yusuf)	21
12. Shu'ayb	25
13. Moses (Musa)	26
14. The Israelites in the Promised Land	38
15. The Destruction of Jerusalem	41
16. Job (Ayub)	43
17. Jonah (Yunus)	44
18. The Family of Imran, Zechariah and John (Zakariyyah and Yahya)	45
19. Mary (Maryam)	47
20. Jesus ('Isa)	48
21. The Violation of the Covenant by the Israelites and the Second Destruction of Jerusalem	50

22. The Christians	52
23. Muhammad	54
24. Some Pious People	64
25. Some Wicked People	68
26. Some Parables	72
27. Some Maxims	78
28. Basic Beliefs	80
29. The Shari'ah: the Code of Conduct	88
30. Real Piety	92
31. Characteristics of Believers	93
32. Characteristics of Hypocrites	94
33. Inter-Human Relations	95
34. Jihad	97
35. Family and Society	98
36. Social Etiquette	99
37. The State	100
38. Laws of War and Justice	101
39. Economic Life	103
40. Food and Farming	104
41. Dietary Rules	105
42. Inter-Faith Relations	106
43. Epilogue	108

Preface

Introduction

The Qur'an is the greatest blessing of Allah for mankind as it guides all to the path of righteousness. It is the culmination of the revelation that started when Allah created the first human being, Adam. It was revealed piecemeal over 23 years during the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) prophetic mission. This covers his period of stay in Mecca (Makkah) for 13 years and the rest of it in Medina (Madinah). It was memorized during the life of the Prophet and also written down on velum, parchments, bones, palm risps and other material as dictated by the Prophet. The sequences of the *ayat* (verses) and *surahs* (chapters) were learnt directly from the Prophet. During the time of the first Caliph, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, all scattered pieces were brought together in 633 C.E. This was called *suhuf* (pages). During the time of the third Caliph, Uthman ibn Affan, a standard bound copy was prepared from the *suhuf* of Abu Bakr and copies of this were sent to the main cities in 653 C.E. This version of the text is called the *Mushaf Uthmani*. It is the only authentic version, of which three copies are still in existence.

Contents of the Qur'an

Altogether the Qur'an is divided into 114 chapters each of which varies in length. About two-thirds of the Qur'an (90 chapters) was revealed in Mecca while the remaining one-third (24 chapters) was revealed in Medina. Altogether, there are 6,236 verses containing 77,933 words, which are composed of 332,015 letters.

The Qur'an is primarily a Book of Guidance. Its purpose is to provide guidelines for human beings so that they can fulfil the role of being Allah's representative on Earth. This Guidance was promised to the Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) when he was sent to Earth. Thus, the Qur'an covers a vast number of subjects: moral, social, economic, political, and legal as well as matters relating to creed and metaphysics. There are references to natural phenomena, and to astronomical, botanical, medical and zoological sciences. It should be noted however, that the Qur'an is not a book of science, though it reflects the book of nature as signs for those who contemplate.

Those who turn to the Qur'an for reasons other than trying to receive guidance may derive some benefit or they may be misguided. They will, however, certainly fail to receive the true blessings of the Qur'an.

Styles

The Qur'an was revealed in the form of an oration; its style clearly intended to attract its audience's attention. Like oratory, its subjects and emphasis vary from one sentence to another. Thus, approaching it like a book loses its effectiveness and one fails to acquire the real treasure of this unique divine message. Its metaphors and arguments bear local colour but its message always remains universal. It is rhymed prose, differing from the poetic tradition of the time and is very soothing to the ears, making its memorisation easy.

In the Meccan chapters, the style and diction is noticeable for its brevity and very powerful flow, which penetrates listeners' hearts and minds. It is like a forceful mountain stream gushing fiercely down to the valley floor. Here can be found forceful arguments on the Oneness of Allah, Prophethood and the Hereafter. In contrast, the Medinan chapters are like the calm waters of a huge river flowing smoothly through the plains. Here, the topics dealt with cover family law, legal and social issues as well as the laws of war and peace.

Throughout the Qur'an we are given glimpses from the stories of the earlier Prophets. Whilst at first sight those seem to be repetitive, they are nevertheless viewed from a different angle each time so as to support the arguments presented.

Key Topics

Many scholars have attempted to condense the Qur'an's key topics according to their own understanding. Shah Wali Allah (d.1762), a prominent Muslim intellectual of eighteenth-century India and a prolific writer on a wide range of Islamic topics in Arabic and Persian, has used the word *Tadhkir* (Reminder) in respect of all Qur'anic teachings. According to him, the basic topics of the Qur'an are as follows:

1. A 'Reminder' through the laws and ordinances of Allah: This is the most important and fundamental part of the Qur'an. On its basis, jurists have compiled a whole Islamic legal code. Shah Wali Allah further divided this into four sub-headings:

- a. All acts of worship and services that cement the relationship between the Creator and His servants. Under this heading can be found: prayers, fasting, almsgiving and hajj (pilgrimage);
 - b. Dealings and transactions. These are laws governing mutual relationships, including trade, commerce, war, peace, etc;
 - c. Social life within both the family and society at large, and
 - d. Political framework and principles of governance.
2. Dealings with other faiths, especially with the Jews and Christians, as well as with the hypocrites. This includes a critical analysis of their deviation from the right path.
 3. A 'Reminder' through Allah's bounties: man is reminded to look around the universe and appreciate what order and harmony it contains and to reflect on its creation. This in turn leads man to realize the Oneness of Allah and the Hereafter.
 4. A 'Reminder' through history: this comprises the narrations of past nations and how Allah dealt with them.
 5. A 'Reminder' of death and of events after death.

These five topics, according to him, neatly cover the entire message of the Qur'an.

100 Minutes with the Qur'an

In the interest of clarity, I have modified Shah Wali Allah's arrangement and started with the story of creation, followed by stories about the Prophets. Then there are stories about good and wicked people that are narrated in the Qur'an as well as some parables and maxims. The rest deals with articles of faith, basic duties, the Islamic code of conduct, laws relating to family and social life, trade and commerce, political structure, criminal law as well as the laws of war and peace. This clearly summarizes the teachings of the Qur'an.

In the three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, there is only One Supreme Being, the Creator of the Universe. In English the word used is 'God' which is synonymous with the Arabic word 'Allah.' Thus whatever appropriate name is used for Him is acceptable. In this publication it seems natural to use the word 'Allah.'

This publication is strictly confined to the contents of the Qur'an, thus many concepts which were developed later on are not included. One significant omission is the concept of *Fatwa*. *Fatwa* is based on the Qur'anic precept, "Ask those who possess knowledge if you do not know." Thus it is a religious opinion concerning Islamic law issued by an Islamic scholar. *Fatwa* means to advise, to counsel and, in other forms, to seek guidance or to seek a ruling. Thus *Fatwa* is an opinion of a scholar on a specific issue but, unlike a court ruling, it cannot be enforced.

To keep the Qur'anic text separate from notes of explanations, sentences in italics are not the text of the Qur'an. Similarly, words added within brackets for explanation are my own effort.

Acknowledgements

Finally, let me emphasize that the Qur'an is the Word of Allah and it cannot be fully translated. What various translators have done is to render its meaning into other languages. I have basically used *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, the abridged version of *Tafhim al-Qur'an* by Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi and translated and edited by Zafar Ishaq Ansari but I have also consulted and sometimes used other translations as well. I am grateful to the publishers, the Islamic Foundation, Markfield, Leicestershire, UK, for giving me permission to use this translation.

I have tried to present the meanings of the Qur'an to the best of my ability. I seek Allah's forgiveness for any mistakes, oversights and inadequacies.

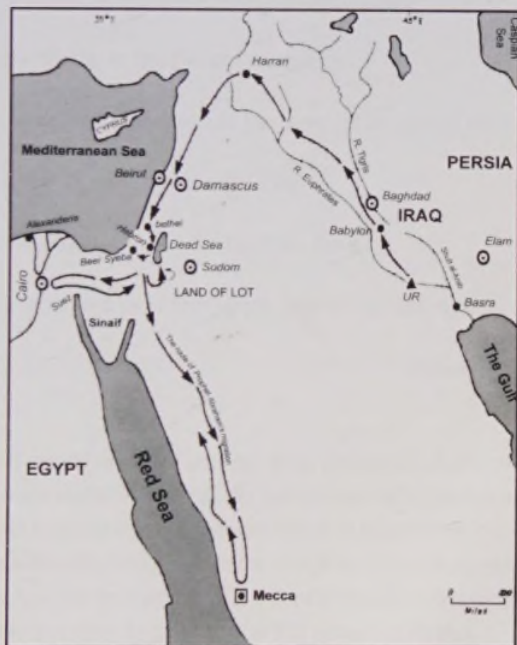
I humbly pray that Allah guide all of us to the right path and forgive our sins and shortcomings.

Abdur Rashid Siddiqui

The Islamic Foundation, Leicester

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The Route of Prophet Abraham's Migration



1 The Opening

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate.

Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the entire Universe,

the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate;

the Master of the Day of Recompense.

You alone do we worship and You alone do we turn to for help.

Direct us on to the Straight Way,

the way of those whom You have favoured,

who did not incur Your wrath, who are not astray.

(Amen)

1: 1-7

This is actually a prayer, one that Allah teaches to all who embark upon the study of His Book. Its position at the beginning of the Qur'an signifies that anyone who wants to benefit from the Book should first offer this prayer to the Lord of the Universe. In response, the whole Qur'an is presented as a Book of Guidance. It is recited by believers at least 32 times daily in five obligatory Prayers.

2 Provenance of the Qur'an

O Prophet, We have sent you forth as a witness, a bearer of good tidings, and a warner for all mankind and as one who calls people to Allah by His leave, and as a bright shining lamp.

Indeed this is a revelation from the Lord of the Universe; which Trustworthy Soul Gabriel (Jibra'il) has carried down to your heart that you might become one of those who warn others on behalf of Allah, a revelation in clear Arabic language.

O Messenger! Deliver what has been revealed to you from your Lord, for if you fail to do that, you have not fulfilled the task of His messengership.

O Prophet, do not stir your tongue hastily to commit the Revelation to memory.

Surely it is for Us to have you commit it to memory and to recite it. And so when We recite it, follow its recitation attentively; then it will be for Us to explain it.

We have revealed the Qur'an in parts and not revealed it to you at once so that We may fully impress it on your mind. So We have revealed it gradually so that you may recite it to people slowly and with deliberation to suit particular occasions.

Indeed it is a Book of exalted power. No falsehood can enter it from the front or from the rear. Indeed it is We Who have sent down the Message and it is indeed We Who are its guardian.

We have, without doubt, sent down the Message and We will assuredly guard it from corruption.

We have revealed the Qur'an in Arabic that you may be able to understand. Indeed it is transcribed in the Original Book (the prime source of all Books sent down to all the prophets) which is in the Preserved Tablet with Us; sublime and full of wisdom.

This Qur'an is indeed the very word of Allah conveyed by a noble messenger-angel and it is not the word of a poet or of a soothsayer nor composed by some human being. Do they not reflect that it is being revealed by the Lord of the Universe?

What is being narrated in the Qur'an is no fabrication; it is rather confirmation of the Books that preceded it, and a detailed exposition of everything, and a guidance and mercy for people of faith. This is the Book of Allah and there is no doubt in it. Had it been from any other than Allah, they would surely have found in it much inconsistency.

The words Messenger and Prophet are often used interchangeably. A Messenger or Prophet is selected from among human beings to receive revelation from Allah for the guidance of his people.

33: 45; 26: 192-195; 5: 67; 75: 16-18; 25: 32; 41: 41-42;
15: 9; 43: 3-4; 69: 40-43; 12: 111; 2: 2; 4: 82.

3 In the Beginning

In the beginning Allah's throne was upon water. He created the heavens and the earth in six days. This was not tiresome for Him to require rest. The duration of one day could be up to fifty thousand years. The heavens and the earth were one solid mass, and then Allah tore them apart. He turned to the heaven while it was all smoke and made them seven heavens and revealed to each heaven its law and also created the sun, the moon and the stars making them all subservient to His command. They all glide along, each in their own orbit and it is not in the sun's power to overtake the moon or the night to outstrip the day.

After creating the earth He set up firm mountains on it, blessed it, and provided it with sustenance in proportion to the needs of all. Allah created every living being out of water and made them in pairs. Some animals move on their bellies, some move on two legs and some on four. Surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, there are signs for people of understanding. Allah established Himself on the Throne of His Dominion, governing all affairs of the Universe.

11: 7; 41: 9-12; 50: 38; 70: 4; 21: 30; 36: 37-40; 24: 45; 3: 190; 10: 3

4 The Creation of Adam and Eve (Adam and Hawwa)

Allah informed the angels that He intended to create a human being out of dry ringed clay wrought from black mud and shape him and breathe into him His Spirit, and that he would be placed as a representative on earth. The angels had misgivings about this as they feared that human beings would spread mischief and cause bloodshed on earth. Allah said He knows what angels do not know. He endowed Adam with knowledge and ordered the angels to prostrate themselves before him; all of them did so except Satan. He refused because of his arrogance being created from fire and not from clay as Adam was.

Allah told Adam and his spouse to live in the Garden and eat from it whatever they liked, but never to approach the forbidden tree or they should become wrongdoers. But Satan, who was one of the Jinns,* pretended to be their friend and tempted them into eating from the forbidden tree. Thus did Satan bring about their fall by deceit. When they tasted of the tree, their shame became visible to them, and both began to cover themselves with leaves from the Garden. Then their Lord called out to them, "Did I not forbid you to eat from that tree, and did I not warn you that Satan is your open enemy?" Thereupon Adam learned from his Lord some words and repented and his Lord accepted his repentance. Allah said, "Get down all of you; henceforth, each of you is an enemy of the other, and on earth you shall have your abode and your livelihood for an appointed time. From time to time My guidance shall come to you then, whoever will follow My guidance need have no fear, nor shall they grieve.

"But those who refuse to accept this guidance and reject it are destined for the Fire where they shall abide for ever." Thus the human race started its life on this earth. They multiplied and prospered by following the guidance of their Lord.

** Jinns are creatures created out of fire, and are thus invisible to humans. Like humans, they are endowed with the ability to choose between good and evil. They are also accountable for their deeds and there are both virtuous and deviant jinns.*

15: 28-29; 2: 30-38; 7: 12-24

5 The Two Sons of Adam

This is the story of the two sons of Adam. When both of them made an offering to Allah, it was accepted from only one of them. The one whose offering was not accepted told the other, "I will surely kill you." His brother said, "Allah only accepts offerings from the God-fearing and even if you stretch forth your hand against me to kill me, I will not reciprocate." At last his evil soul drove him to the murder of his brother. Thereupon Allah sent forth a raven which began to scratch the earth to show him how he might cover the corpse of his brother. So seeing this he regretted that he even did not know how to dispose of the dead body. Therefore, Allah ordained for the Children of Israel that he who slays a soul unless as a punishment for committing a capital crime shall be as if he had slain all mankind; and he who saves a life shall be as if he had given life to all mankind.

5: 27-32

6 Noah (Nuh)

With the passage of time, the teachings of the prophets were corrupted and Satan tricked people into venerating their pious elders and into making their statues. Thus, slowly people started to worship idols. The people of Noah inhabited the land now called Iraq.

Fulfilling His promise that He would send Messengers to guide mankind Allah sent forth Noah to his people. He said, "I have been sent to you to warn you that you may worship none but Allah or else I fear for you the punishment of a grievous day." The elders of the people said, "You are merely a human being like us and those who follow you are the lowliest of our folk and further we consider you to be a liar." Noah pleaded with them that he had their welfare at heart and that he did not seek any recompense from them. As regards those who followed him, he would not drive them away even though others looked upon them with disdain. The unbelievers challenged Noah to bring the chastisement upon them if what he said was the truth.

Noah lived for 950 years during which time he kept on preaching even though very few people accepted his message. Eventually, it was revealed to Noah that no more of his people would ever come to believe him. Allah therefore asked Noah to build the Ark as instructed. Whenever the elders of his nation passed by seeing Noah building an Ark, they would scoff at him. He, however, warned them of a humiliating chastisement.

Allah told Noah to embark upon the Ark with the believers and a pair of every species. When the flood came, the Ark sailed away and everything else perished. Then the Command was given, "Earth! Swallow up your water," and, "Heavens! Abate!" So the water subsided, the Command was fulfilled, and the Ark settled on Mount Judi. Allah said, "Noah! Disembark, with Our peace, and with blessings upon you and upon those who are with you." Thus Noah and his followers were saved and the rest perished.

7: 59-68; 11: 25-48; 26: 105-120; 71: 1-28.

7 Hud

Noah's descendants spread to the four corners of the earth. One such community inhabiting southern Arabia in the Ahqaf area which lies between Hijaz, Yemen and Yamamah, were called the Ad. They were a very prosperous people who built huge, lofty castles and innumerable monuments.

Allah sent Hud to them. He said, "My people! Serve Allah: you have no god but He. In attributing partners to Allah you have merely been fabricating lies. My people, I seek no reward from you for my work. My reward lies only with Him Who created me. Do you not understand anything? My people! Ask your Lord for forgiveness and turn to Him in repentance. He will shower abundant rains upon you from the heaven, and will add strength to your strength. Do not turn away as those given to guilt." They said, "O Hud! You have not brought to us any clear evidence, and we are not going to forsake our gods merely because you say so. We are not going to believe you. All we can say is that some of our gods have afflicted you with evil." Hud warned them of the consequences of their rejection but to no avail. When Allah's wrath came in the form of a terrible tempest it uprooted trees and destroyed all their homes. However, Hud, together with those who shared his faith were saved while the rest perished.

7: 65-72; 11: 50-60; 26: 123-139.

8 Salih

The Thamud lived in the north-western part of Arabia which is still called al-Hijr. Like the Ad the Thamud were descendants of Noah to whom Allah sent Salih as a Messenger. He brought Allah's guidance and asked them to worship Him and seek His forgiveness. Salih's people, however, rejected and disbelieved him, continuing instead to worship their idols.

Salih reminded them that after the Ad's demise, Allah had made them their successors and in this way they had all the resources of the earth at their disposal. So they were able to build palaces on the plains and hew out dwellings in the mountains. Salih pleaded with them that they should be grateful for Allah's wondrous bounties and not go about creating mischief in the land. The haughty elders of his nation however refused to accept his claim of being Allah's Messenger unless he produced some sign which would support the claim.

In response, Salih pointed to the she-camel and said, "This is Allah's sign for you so let her graze, and do not hurt her or else some punishment shall befall you. This camel will drink water from the well one day and your animals will drink the next day." The Thamud reluctantly agreed to this arrangement, but being a proud and haughty people they broke their promise. One of them cruelly slaughtered the she-camel, disdainfully disobeying the commandment of their Lord, and said, "O Salih! Bring upon us the scourge with which you threatened us if you are truly a prophet."

Thereupon a shocking catastrophe in the form of a thunderbolt seized them followed by an earthquake and they lay prostrate in their dwellings. Salih then left them, saying, "O my people! I conveyed to you the message of my Lord and gave you good advice; but you have no liking for your well-wishers."

7: 73-79; 11: 61-67; 26: 141-158

9 Abraham (Ibrahim)

Early Life

Abraham was born in the city of Ur (in modern Iraq) to a family of idol worshippers. His father Azar was in the business of carving idols. However, Allah had bestowed distinctive intuitive perception of guidance on Abraham and knowing his capabilities showed him the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, so that he should become a true believer. When by observing that all the heavenly bodies rise and then set, Abraham concluded that they have no power and he refused to associate other deities with Allah in His Divinity. Yet to strengthen his faith and conviction he asked Allah to show him how He gives life to the dead. Allah told him to take four birds and tame them, then to cut them into pieces placing a part of them on every hill. He was then to summon these birds and see how they flew back to him. This convinced Abraham and further confirmed his faith.

Abraham kept arguing with his father and others pointing out the futility of worshipping idols and reminding them that there is only One Lord of the heavens and the earth and that they should be worshipping only Him.

Once while he was alone in the temple, Abraham smashed all his people's idols into pieces, sparing only the supreme one among them. When the people returned and saw their idols in such a state, they suspected that it must be the work of Abraham who was always speaking against them.

When they interrogated Abraham about this he innocently pointed to their supreme idol and suggested that they should ask him if he could speak. So they realized their folly of worshipping things that could neither hear nor speak. In anger, however, they decided to burn Abraham. They prepared a pit of fire and threw him into it, but Allah commanded the fire to become cool, thus saving Abraham from suffering any harm. Thereupon Abraham, dissociating himself from his people and his family as well as their deities, left Ur for another city accompanied by his wife, Sarah, and his nephew, Lot (Lut).

6: 74-83; 21: 51-71; 37: 83-99

His Mission Abroad

Abraham arrived in a city ruled by a tyrant king who claimed divinity. When Abraham attended his court he said to the king, "My Lord is He Who grants life and causes death." He replied, "I grant life and cause death as well." By way of demonstration he spared the life of a prisoner condemned to die and killed an innocent person. Abraham said, "But surely Allah causes the sun to rise from the east; now you cause it to rise from the west." Thus the king was confounded and could argue no more.

Then Abraham went to Egypt where he was well received by the ruling Pharaoh who gave his daughter, Hagar (Hajar), in marriage to Abraham. After a brief stay in Egypt, Abraham and his family moved to Palestine. For a while he lived there with his wives.

Then Allah asked Abraham to move Hagar to Arabia. There, his son, Ishmael (Isma'il), was born to Hagar and by the will of Allah Abraham settled them in a valley at a place which is now known as Mecca and returned to Palestine. Allah helped Hagar and Ishmael and provided sustenance as water sprang out of the barren ground, which is now known as the Well of Zamzam. Thus, they were able to cultivate the land and lived comfortably.

2: 258; 14: 35-38; 37: 99-101

The Sacrifice of his son

When Ishmael was old enough to go about and work with his father, Abraham dreamt that he was sacrificing his son. Interpreting this as a command from Allah, he told this to his son who readily agreed that his father fulfil the command contained in his dream. When both surrendered to Allah's command and Abraham flung Ishmael down on his forehead, Allah cried out, "O Abraham, you have indeed fulfilled your dream." And He ransomed him with a mighty sacrifice, in the form of the ram that angels brought before Abraham at that precise moment so that he might slaughter it instead of his son. As Abraham successfully stood various tests, his Lord appointed him the leader of all people. When Abraham asked, "Is this also a covenant for my descendants?" the Lord responded, "My covenant does not embrace the wrongdoers." Thus conferment of leadership applied only to those of Abraham's offspring who were righteous.

Then Allah sent His angels to convey the good news of the birth of Isaac (Ishaq), and then Isaac's son Jacob (Ya'qub). His wife, Sarah, hearing this laughed and said, "Woe to me! Shall I bear a child now that I am an old woman and my husband is much too age-stricken? This indeed is strange." The angels said, "Do you wonder at Allah's decree? May Allah's mercy and blessing be upon your household." Thus both Isaac and his son Jacob were blessed to be Prophets and among the righteous.

37: 102-113; 11: 69-73; 14: 39-40; 15: 51-56; 51: 24-30

Building the Ka'bah

During his stay in Mecca, Abraham, with the help of his son, built a house called the Ka'bah for the worship of Allah. While raising its foundations, both prayed that their descendants remain subservient to Allah and asked Him to make this House a resort for mankind and a place of security. Abraham prayed to His Lord to keep his progeny away from idol worship, to make people's hearts affectionately inclined to them, and to provide them with fruits for their sustenance. Abraham praised Allah Who, despite Abraham's old age, had given him two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. He further prayed that a Messenger may be raised among his offspring who would recite to them Allah's verses; a Messenger who would instruct them in the Book and in wisdom and purify their lives.

Thus Allah accepted Abraham's prayer and preserved for him a good name among posterity.

2: 124-133; 14: 35-41

10 Lot (Lut)

Lot was also bestowed with prophethood. He was assigned the mission of reforming those misguided people who had inhabited the land near the Dead Sea and that presently lies submerged under it.

Lot admonished them for their practice of indecency. He said to them, "Do you realise that you practise an indecency of which no other people in the world were guilty of before you? You approach men lustfully in place of women. You are a people who exceed all bounds." They said, "O Lot! If you do not desist, you will be one of those expelled from our towns." He said, "I am one of those who abhor your practice. My Lord, deliver me and my family from these wicked deeds."

When angels in the guise of handsome young men went to Lot's home he was perturbed and troubled by their coming. His people came to him, rushing to seize the strangers to commit evil deeds against them. Lot said, "My people! Here are my daughters you can marry; they are purer for you. Have fear of Allah and do not disgrace me concerning my guests. Is there not even one right-minded person in your midst?" They said, "Surely you already know that we have nothing to do with your daughters. You also know well what we want." He said, "Would that I had the strength to set you straight or could seek refuge in some powerful support." Thereupon the angels said, "O Lot! We indeed are messengers of your Lord. And your people will in no way be able to hurt you.

So depart with your family during the night and let none of you turn around excepting your wife who shall not go; for what will befall them shall also befall her." And by Allah's command the town was turned upside down and stones of baked clay rained on it. In this way, the evil-doers were destroyed for ever.

7: 80-84; 11: 77-83; 26: 160-173; 29: 33-35; 51: 31-37

11 Joseph (Yusuf)

Joseph was Abraham's great grandson. His father Jacob was of Isaac's son. Both of them were also blessed with prophethood by Allah. Jacob's name in Hebrew is Israel which means a servant of Allah. He had twelve sons, hence those who belong to his progeny are called Children of Israel or Israelites.

Joseph's Dream

One day Joseph told his father that he had dreamt that eleven stars and the sun and moon were prostrating themselves before him. Jacob, noting that his other sons were jealous of Joseph asked him not to relate his dream to them; in essence, the dream was an indication that Allah's favours would be bestowed on Joseph just as had happened with his forefathers.

Joseph's brothers nevertheless contrived to get rid of him. They persuaded their father to let them take Joseph with them on a picnic in the woods. As planned earlier, they dumped Joseph into a dark pit, hoping that some passing caravan of traders and their camels would take him out of it. At nightfall, they came home crying and produced Joseph's false blood-stained shirt to convince their father that a wolf had devoured him.

Joseph in Egypt

A passing caravan had released Joseph from the pit and then sold him as a slave in Egypt. The man who bought him treated him kindly like his own son. When Joseph reached the age of maturity, Allah taught him the interpretation of dreams and granted him

judgement and knowledge. This shows that Allah has full power to implement His design, although most people do not know this.

Joseph's Trial

It so happened that one day the lady of the house bolted the door and sought to tempt Joseph to herself. Joseph resisted her advances and rushed towards the door whereby she tore his shirt from behind. Then, both of them found the husband of the lady at the door. Seeing him she accused Joseph of committing indecency. However, an independent person said that as Joseph's shirt had been torn from behind the man's wife was clearly lying. The husband asked Joseph to disregard this and asked his wife to seek forgiveness.

On hearing that rumours about this scenario were circulating among the ladies of the city, the chief's wife arranged a banquet for them and gave each guest a knife. Then, while they were cutting and eating the fruit she had offered them, she signalled for Joseph to come out to them. When the ladies saw him they were so struck with admiration that they cut their hands. Thus, she tried to vindicate herself. She threatened Joseph that if he did not follow her orders he would certainly be imprisoned and humiliated. Joseph prayed to his Lord to save him from the guile of such women, saying that he would prefer imprisonment to what they asked him to do. Allah granted his prayer and saved him from their deceit.

Joseph in Prison

Then, despite Joseph's innocence it occurred to them to cast him into prison for a while. Along with Joseph two young men also entered the prison's confines. Seeing Joseph as a good person they narrated their dreams to him for interpretation. Before telling them what their dreams meant Joseph said, "This knowledge is part of what I have been taught by my Lord. This is the way of my forefathers who believed in Allah and the Hereafter. Others whom you worship are merely fabricated names. Here is the interpretation of your dreams: one of you will be freed and serve wine to his lord. As for the other, he will be crucified and birds will eat of his head."

The Interpretation of Pharaoh's Dream

Once, the Pharaoh dreamt of the time that there were seven fat cows and seven lean cows were devouring them, and there were seven fresh green ears of corn and seven others dry and withered. His courtiers could not interpret the dream. Then, the freed prisoner remembered Joseph and went to him to find out the interpretation. After hearing the dream, Joseph suggested that the Egyptians should cultivate for seven years and only use part of the produce for their consumption, saving the rest. These abundant years would be followed by seven years of hardship in which they should use the produce stored earlier.

After hearing this Pharaoh summoned Joseph but he refused to go until the case of the women who had falsely accused him was resolved. Eventually these women declared Joseph's innocence.

Family Reunion

Thus, Joseph secured royal favour and was appointed the official in charge of the treasury. In this way, he managed to successfully steer the country, which was hit by a prolonged famine covering the whole region. When his brothers came to Egypt to buy food he played a trick on them by detaining Benjamin (Benyamin), his younger brother. When Jacob heard this he asked his remaining sons to return to Egypt and try to find Joseph and his brother and not to despair of Allah's mercy.

They went to Joseph pleading how their family had been struck with distress and begging him for charity. When Joseph reminded them what they had done to Joseph and his brother Benjamin, they recognized Joseph and sought his forgiveness. Joseph gracefully forgave them and asked them to bring the whole family to Egypt. When they all arrived, Joseph raised his parents to the throne beside himself, and they bowed in prostration before him. Joseph said: "This was the fulfilment of the vision he had had before." He thanked Allah for His kindness and he prayed, "My Lord! You have bestowed dominion upon me and have taught me to comprehend the depths of things. O Creator of the heavens and earth! You are my Guardian in this world and in the Hereafter. Cause me to die in submission to You, and join me, in the end, with the righteous."

O Muhammad, this is part of the news from the Unseen that We reveal to you for you were not present with them when these events took place.

12 Shu'ayb

The Midianites were traders and their towns were situated at the crossroads of the routes from Yemen through Mecca and Yanbu to Syria along the Red Sea coast, and from Iraq to Egypt.

To Midian, Allah sent forth Shu'ayb: He exhorted them, "O my people! Serve Allah alone and none other. Give just weight and measure and do not cheat people, and make no mischief on the earth. Do not lie in ambush by every path threatening and hindering those who believe from the path of Allah, nor seek to make the path crooked. Remember, how you were once few, and then He multiplied you, and keep in mind what was the end of the mischief-makers. Allah shall judge between us who is on the right path." They replied arrogantly, "Shu'ayb, do your prayers command you that we should abandon what our fathers worshipped or forbid us to do whatever we like with our own property?" Shu'ayb said that he had received clear guidance from His Lord and that was what he was conveying to them.

The haughty elders of his nation said, "O Shu'ayb! We shall certainly banish you and your companions from our town, or else you shall return to our faith." Shu'ayb pleaded with his Lord to judge rightly between him and his people. When the haughty elders continued to threaten him and his followers with banishment from the town, a shocking catastrophe seized them, and they remained prostrate in their dwellings. Shu'ayb then departed from his people, and said, "O my people! Surely I conveyed to you the message of my Lord, and gave you sincere advice. How, then, can I mourn for a people who refuse to accept the Truth?"

7: 85-93; 11: 84-95; 26: 177-189

13 Moses (Musa)

Upbringing

During the time of Joseph, Jacob's entire family, his other sons included, moved to Egypt, settling there. With the passage of time, another dynasty came to power in Egypt and the Israelites lost all their earlier prestige and influence. Indeed, the Israelites too became morally corrupt, deviating from the path of righteousness instilled in them by their forefathers. The ruling pharaoh was an arrogant tyrant and claimed to be the Lord of the world. He oppressed the Israelites and to control their population ordered all male babies to be killed and made their women-folk maid-servants.

During this period Moses was born to a family of Israelites. His mother, fearing that he would be killed by Pharaoh's officials, was worried about how to protect her baby. Allah inspired her with the idea of putting her baby in a box and leaving it to float along the River Nile. She asked her daughter to follow the box unperceived by others. As the box passed by Pharaoh's palace it was noticed by Pharaoh's wife. She was moved by the sight of a little baby and urged her husband that they should adopt him. However, by the will of Allah none of the nurses were able to suckle the baby. Then, Moses' sister suggested that she knew a person who would be able to help. Thus, Moses was restored to his mother for fostering him.

Moses grew up in Pharaoh's household and Allah gave him knowledge and wisdom. He was aware of the Israelites' oppression

and hated injustice. One day, when he was in the city, he saw two people fighting. One of them was an Israelite and the other was an Egyptian. Seeing Moses the Israelite shouted for help. Moses intervened and struck the Egyptian who died from this blow. Moses regretted this tragedy and sought Allah's forgiveness. As guards were on the look out for the Egyptian's killer, Moses decided to leave Egypt and Allah guided him to Midian.

20: 38-40; 28: 7-21

Moses in Midian

Moses was a stranger in Midian and was looking to find somewhere to stay. He reached a well used by the locals for watering their animals. He found two girls waiting for their turn as they could not compete with strong men who refused to let them in. Moses, filled with compassion, helped the girls. They took him to their father who was an old man. When he heard Moses' story he gave him shelter. He suggested that Moses live with him and help in looking after the animals for eight years. On this condition, he was prepared to marry one of his daughters to him. The deal was agreed, and Moses decided to live in Midian.

When Moses had finished the agreed term of contract, he departed with his family for Egypt. During this long journey on a cold night they lost their way. Moses observed a fire at a distance and thought he might get a brand from it for his family as well as some guidance for his route. When he came to it, a voice called out, "Moses! Verily I am your Lord! Take off your shoes. You are in the

sacred Valley of Tuwa!" Allah informed him that He had chosen him as His Messenger and that he should serve Him only as there is no Allah besides Him.

Allah gave Moses two of His signs. One was that his staff would change into a moving snake when thrown and by holding it again it would return to its former state. The other was that by placing his hand in his armpit it became shining white. With these signs Moses was commanded to go to Pharaoh. Moses prayed, "Lord! Open my breast for me; and ease my task for me, and loosen the knot from my tongue so that they may understand my speech; and appoint for me, from my household, someone who will help me bear my burden – Aaron (Harun), my brother. Strengthen me through him and let him share my task." Allah accepted his petition and asked both of them to go to Pharaoh, for he had transgressed all bounds, and speak to him gently; perhaps he may take heed or fear Allah.

28: 22-35; 20: 9-36; 27: 7-14

Moses in Pharaoh's Court

Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh's court so as to invite him to Allah's way, to show him His signs and to ask him to let the Children of Israel go with them, and not to chastise them. Pharaoh asked, "Who is the Lord of the two of you?" Moses replied: "Our Lord is He Who gave everything its form and guided it." Then Pharaoh mockingly asked his high official Haman to build a lofty

tower so that he could scale the highways to heaven and take a look at Moses' God. Then, he accused them, saying, "Have you come to us to drive us out of our land by your sorcery? We shall confront you with sorcery like your own." So a day was appointed for the encounter.

When all the sorcerers gathered, Moses asked them to throw down their staffs. They threw ropes and staffs which turned into snakes slithering around. Allah inspired Moses to throw his staff, which he did, and it swallowed all the magician's fake inventions. Seeing this spectacle, the magicians fell down in prostration and proclaimed their faith in the One Lord. Pharaoh was wild with rage and threatened them with severe punishment but even this could not shake their faith.

Seeing Moses gaining popular support after his success, the elders of Pharaoh's nation said, "Will you leave Moses and his people alone to spread mischief in the land, and to forsake you and your gods?" Pharaoh replied, "We will kill their male children and spare their female ones. For indeed we hold irresistible sway over them."

7: 103-127; 10: 75-82; 20: 49-74; 26: 16-51

Moses' Preaching to the Israelites

Moses asked his people, "Seek help from Allah and be steadfast. The earth belongs to Allah; He bestows it on those of His servants He chooses. The end of things belongs to the God-fearing."

The people replied, "We were oppressed before your coming to us and after it." Moses said, "Your Lord will soon destroy your enemy and make you rulers in the land. Then He will see how you act."

Only a few youths accepted Moses, fearing that Pharaoh and their own chiefs would persecute them. Moses instructed his people to believe in Allah and to rely on Him alone. They replied that they had placed their reliance on Allah and hoped He would not make them a trial for the oppressors but instead deliver them, through His mercy, from the unbelievers. Allah directed Moses and Aaron to prepare a few houses for their people in order to establish Prayer. Moses prayed, "Our Lord! You have bestowed upon Pharaoh and his nobles splendour and riches in the world and they have led people astray from Your path. So obliterate their riches and harden their hearts as they may not believe until they observe the painful punishment." Allah accepted Moses' prayer and asked him to remain steadfast.

Then, Allah afflicted the people of Pharaoh with hard times and with a poor harvest such that they may take heed. He also afflicted them with a great flood, locusts, lice, frogs, and blood. All these were distinct signs and yet they remained haughty. They were a wicked people. Each time a scourge struck them, they pleaded with Moses to pray for them to remove it. Each time, they promised that they would truly believe in him, and would let the Children of Israel go with him. But when Allah removed the scourge from them they broke their promise at once.

Moses and the Wise Man

According to authentic traditions, this person was called Khidr, and the place where Moses met him was probably the confluence of the Blue and White Niles at Khartoum in the Sudan.

Moses was facing a tremendous challenge as he watched hundreds of thousands of his people groaning under the yoke of Pharaoh's oppression and tyranny, and with Pharaoh refusing to bow down before the Truth after each turn of events. So, he was sent out on a journey to seek knowledge and gain insight into the meanings that may exist behind incomprehensible events that happen in the world. He accompanied a wise person appointed by Allah to take him on a journey through three historical events. Firstly, they went on a boat and his companion made a hole in the boat, obviously placing every passenger at risk of drowning. Next, they met a boy who his companion puts to death without any justification, apparently to the great suffering of his parents. And lastly, they entered a town where people were so evil that they refused to even feed them, but his companion restored and rebuilt a crumbling wall that he found in the town, without asking for any wages.

The basic condition agreed to by Moses before the start of the journey was that he would bear with patience everything that he saw and could not comprehend, but without question. But Moses could not, however, refrain from raising objections to each happening and hence the journey ended.

The meaning and purpose behind each event was then explained to him. By making a hole in the boat belonging to the poor it was made defective to save it from loss to a tyrant, whose dominion lay beyond, and who was seizing every boat by force. The boy was made to die because he was going to grow up into an evil being, ultimately causing greater suffering to his righteous parents than his death; moreover, Allah intended to compensate them with a better alternative. The wall in the evil people's town, which was rebuilt without compensation, had treasure beneath it, which Allah wanted to keep hidden, and therefore safe, so that later, its rightful owners, the orphaned children of a righteous man would be able to take it out and use it.

This journey convinced Moses how things which apparently seem unjust and oppressive have a greater purpose behind them.

18: 60-82

The Pleadings of a Man of Faith

One day, Pharaoh proposed to his councillors that they should kill Moses as he was trying to change their religion. Then, a man from Pharaoh's folk, who had kept his faith hidden, argued against why they should kill someone just because he believed in One God and had brought clear signs from Him. If Moses were a liar, his lying would recoil upon him; but if he were truthful, they would face the awesome consequences of which he had warned them. Although they now held the kingdom, this could be destroyed like the calamity which had overtaken earlier nations.

He asked them to follow him so that he could lead them to the right path. He pleaded with them, saying, "My people, how is it that I call you to salvation while you call me to the Fire. Soon you shall remember what I say to you. I entrust my affairs to Allah. Surely Allah is watchful over His servants." Eventually, Allah saved him from all Pharaoh's evil and his followers' evil.

40: 28-45

Exodus from Egypt

Allah guided Moses to the belief that he should lead the Israelites out of Egypt. However, once embarked upon the journey, they were followed by Pharaoh and his army. Although this frightened the Israelites, Moses had faith in his Lord. When they reached the seashore, Allah commanded Moses to strike the water with his staff. This divided the sea as if two mountains were raised on either side and Moses with his followers safely crossed to the other side. Pharaoh also advanced with his army in hot pursuit. However, when they reached the middle of the path, the sea once again flooded back over them and they were all drowned.

The Israelites camped in the Sinai desert. Allah, out of His mercy, provided them with shade from the clouds, an abundance of water and sweet manna and birds for food. In spite of this generosity, the Israelites became bored eating the same food and demanded that food which they were accustomed to eating in Egypt.

10: 90-92; 20: 77-78; 26: 52-66; 2: 57, 60-61; 7: 160-61

Moses at Mount Sinai

Now that the Israelites were free from the yoke of slavery, as a free nation they needed the Law to guide them and so Allah commanded Moses to go to Mount Sinai. Moses was in haste to receive the commandments and went earlier than the appointed time and, thus, remained there for 40 days. His Lord spoke to him. Moses asked His Lord to reveal Himself so that he could see Him. Allah told him that he could never see Him for even the mountain would not remain firm in its place but would be crushed to fine dust. So when his Lord unveiled His Glory, Moses fell down in a swoon. When he recovered, his Lord gave him the book – the Torah (Tawrat). This was in the form of the Tablets containing all the admonition and guidance. He told Moses to hold on to these with all his strength and to bid his people to follow them.

During Moses' long absence, the Israelites had slipped back into idolatry and started worshipping a golden calf, which had been artificially created by the Samiriy.* When on his return Moses saw such idol-worship, he flew into a rage. He threw down all the Tablets and commanded that the calf be burned. After rebuking his people, Moses turned to Aaron and remonstrated with him. Aaron pleaded his innocence and said that he wanted to keep all his people united. Moses then asked the Samiri to explain his case. He answered that he had moulded the image of the calf out of the gold ornaments people had given him and then he had taken a handful of dust from the Messenger's footprint and had thrown it into the calf.

Moses said that his punishment for the rest of his life would be that he kept on saying, "Touch me not." Furthermore, a term of reckoning awaited the Samiri in the Hereafter. Then Moses told his people, "You have committed idolatry and you should put to death those of your own number who have worshipped the calf."

Moses was summoned for the second time to Mount Sinai along with 70 chiefs from among his nation in order that they might seek pardon for their calf-worship and renew their covenant with Allah. They had told Moses that they would not believe in him until they clearly saw Allah speaking to him. Then when they went there a violent shaking seized them. Moses implored his Lord, beseeched Him for His mercy, and pleaded for forgiveness. So was the Israelites, covenant with Allah renewed.

**The Samiri was not the proper name of that person. It is likely he belonged to the Sumerians, a well-known ancient nation, some of whom lived in Egypt during the time of Moses. It seems that one of them converted and joined the Exodus.*

7: 142-156; 20: 83-98; 2: 93

The Sacrifice of a Cow

Once, a dead body was found in a field and it was not known who had committed the murder. The people disputed among themselves and blamed each other. Moses was asked by Allah to instruct his people to sacrifice a cow. They treated this as a jest. When Moses persisted that they fulfil Allah's command, they tried to put him off

by one pretext or another, asking any number of questions about the colour, age and quality of the cow. The reason for their reluctance was that they were influenced by neighbouring tribes who worshipped the cow. After reluctantly sacrificing the yellow and bright-coloured cow, the one which used to be worshipped, they were asked to touch a part of the slaughtered cow on the dead man. When they did this, Allah brought him back to life and he disclosed the name of his murderer. Thus, Allah was determined to bring to light what the Israelites were trying to hide.

2:67-73

Korah (Qarun)

Korah was one of Moses' people; then he transgressed against them. Allah had bestowed on him much wealth and an abundance of resources. His people advised him not to so exalt himself as it was disliked by Allah. Rather, he should seek by his riches the Abode of the Hereafter. He replied, "All this I have acquired from skills and knowledge that I have." He forgot that Allah had destroyed before him many stronger people.

Once, Korah went forth among his people in full glitter. The worldly people envied him and wished that they had such a great fortune. But those endowed with true knowledge remonstrated, saying that Allah's reward is best for believers who are patient.

At last, Allah caused the earth to swallow Korah and his house: no one could help him nor was he able to help himself. Furthermore those who had earlier envied his position regretted that they had

forgotten that the unbelievers do not prosper. Now they thanked Allah that He had spared them from a similar calamity.

As for the Abode of the Hereafter, Allah shall assign it exclusively for those who do not seek glory on earth nor want to cause mischief. The God-fearing shall have the best end. He who shall bring a good deed shall be rewarded with what is better. But those who bring about evil deeds shall not be punished more than their deeds.

28: 76-84

The Lands of the Ancient Tribes



14 The Israelites in the Promised Land

Guided by Allah, Moses asked his followers to enter the Holy Land where they could live in freedom and security. Owing to their past life of humiliation and abasement the Israelites lacked the courage to fight the enemy. They asked that Moses and his Lord should go and dislodge the enemy for only then would they enter the Holy Land; in other words if this didn't happen, they would remain where they were. For such insolent behaviour, they were cursed to remain wandering in the desert for 40 years until the generation that had lived in Egypt were dead. Moses also died during this period.

After Moses' death the new generation of Israelites successfully defeated their enemies under the leadership of Joshua (Yusha'). They were told to enter the gate of the city humbly seeking their Lord's forgiveness. Yet the wrongdoers among them substituted the words of repentance and Allah sent down a further scourge upon them.

5: 20-26; 2: 58-59

David (Dawud)

Then there was a succession of prophets who guided the Israelites. One of their prophets appointed Saul (Talut) as King to fight their enemies. He, with the help of young David, who killed a strong army general, Goliath (Jalut), in a battle, was able to defeat the enemy. Later, Allah appointed David as a Prophet. He was endowed with knowledge, wisdom and a vast kingdom and Allah further appointed him as a representative on earth. He possessed a melodious voice and when he praised his Lord, mountains and birds also joined him in his praise. These hymns were collected in the book called the Psalms of David (Zabur).

Allah also taught David the craft of making coats of mail and other ironworks.

Once, two litigants came to David wanting to resolve their dispute. From the case it appeared that one of them had committed an excess against the other. David, however, realized that it was in fact, he who was being tested for some lapse that he had committed. He instantly sought forgiveness from his Lord and fell down, bowing and penitently turning to Him.

There was another instance when David gave a judgement in a case regarding a field into which the sheep of some people strayed at night. However, his son Solomon (Sulayman) suggested a better way of resolving the situation than the one decided upon by David. He accepted his son's suggestion and thus demonstrated his magnanimity.

2: 247-251; 21: 78-80; 34: 10-11; 38:17-26

Solomon (Sulayman)

David was succeeded by his son Solomon who was also blessed with wisdom. He was given the knowledge of understanding the tongues of birds and other creatures.

Allah also subjected the wind to his command, so that it blew gently at his bidding, wherever he directed it.

Once, Solomon arrived at a valley of ants and one of the ants warned the others to get into their holes lest they be trampled on by Solomon and his hosts.

When Solomon heard this he smiled and thanked Allah for the favours He had bestowed on him.

When a hoopoe bird brought him the news of the Kingdom of Sheba (Saba) that worshipped the sun instead of Allah, he summoned their Queen. Solomon had beforehand miraculously arranged to bring the Queen's throne to his palace. She was so amazed upon seeing this and the other splendours of Solomon's kingdom that she submitted to worshipping the One God.

One evening Solomon inspected his well-trained horses of noble breed for which he was grateful, remembering the favours of his Lord. When the horses withdrew, he ordered them to be brought back. He then admired them by gently stroking their shanks and necks in acknowledged thankfulness to Allah. Solomon was put to other tests as well during which he always penitently turned to his Lord. He prayed: "My Lord, forgive me and bestow upon me a kingdom such as none other after me will deserve."

Solomon was also given control over the jinns who remained in fetters under his command. He engaged them in menial jobs and used their labour for constructing whatever he desired: sanctuaries, sculptures, basins and anchored cauldrons. When death overtook Solomon while he was supervising the work, nothing gave any indication to the jinns of his death. Only when termites ate away the staff on which he was leaning and it fell down, did they know about his death.

21: 81-82; 27: 15-44; 34: 12-14; 38: 30-40

15 The Destruction of Jerusalem

Owing to repeated violations of their covenant with Allah, His wrath overtook the Israelites. In this respect, the Babylonian army came and destroyed their Temple, penetrated their homes and carried all of them off into captivity. During this exile, Jeremiah (Yarimayah) encouraged his people and exhorted them to repent and seek Allah's forgiveness. During this period, to test the Israelites' faith, Allah sent two angels, Harut and Marut, in the form of divines who could work magic and sorcery. These angels at once began working their magical wonders but they warned the people that their presence among them was designed to test their faith. Despite the warning the Israelites had become so fond of their magical artifices that they continued to pounce upon the talismans and sorcery they taught and cause separation between spouses.

The Israelites were required to observe the sanctity of the Sabbath by giving it over to rest and total devotion. To test their commitment, the people of a town situated alongside the sea* faced a challenge. They could not restrain their temptation when fish appeared on the water's surface. Thus, by fishing they profaned the Sabbath. Some of the God-fearing admonished them for their sin so that they could proffer the excuse before their Lord that they had performed their duty. But the others said it is no use admonishing them as they will not listen. Hence Allah afflicted the wrongdoers with a grievous chastisement but saved those who forbade them from committing an evil deed.

Eventually, when the Persians had conquered Babylonia, the Israelites were allowed to return to Jerusalem. Many prophets were sent by Allah to bring the Israelites back to the path of righteousness.

17: 4-7; 2: 102; 7: 163-166

** Probably today's Eilat.*

16 Job (Ayub)

There is not much information about Job's personality, nationality or about the times during which he lived. What is certain is that he was a pious and upright person who was endowed with wealth and a large family and he led a prosperous life. Yet he was also grateful to his Lord and helped the poor and deprived of the city.

Allah wanted to test Job's faith and so He deprived him of his wealth as well as his family and health. In spite of these afflictions, which he endured for years, he remained steadfast, constantly remembering and thanking his Lord. His supplication was "O Lord! Disease has struck me and You are the most Merciful." His Lord ordered him "Stamp your foot on the earth, and here is cool water to wash with and to drink." He was suffering from a skin disease which was cured by such washing. Then Allah mercifully restored to him his family. All this, then, serves as a reminder to wise people.

During his illness Job, in a fit of annoyance, swore that he would strike someone with a certain number of lashes. After Allah restored him to health, his dilemma was how to fulfil his oath. Allah removed this perplexity by directing him to pick up a broom containing as many pieces of straw as the number of lashes he had sworn and to strike the person with the broom just once. This would enable him to fulfil his oath. Job was indeed most patient and a most commendable servant of Allah.

21: 83-84; 38: 41-44

17 Jonah (Yunus)

Allah sent Jonah as a Prophet to the people of Ninevah to guide them. He preached there for several years but the people disregarded his preaching. He was so annoyed that he angrily left the town without Allah's permission. He predicted that the Assyrians would all perish unless they repented.

He embarked on a fully laden ship and when the ship encountered a severe storm, the sailors, according to their tradition believed that there was some slave running away from his master and until that person was found and thrown overboard the ship would not come out of the storm. The lots were drawn and each time Jonah's name turned up and so he was thrown overboard. By Allah's mercy, a huge fish swallowed him. Jonah realized his mistake of abandoning the city without Allah's permission and repented in the dark belly of the fish calling his Lord "There is no god but You. Glory be to You. I am one of the wrongdoers." Eventually the fish disgorged him onto dry land in a state of sickness. Allah caused a gourd tree to grow over him that provided him with both shade and sustenance. He was instructed to go back to his people. When Jonah returned, he found that when he had left them the people had become frightened; indeed, they had taken heed of his advice and repented. Thus, Allah permitted them to enjoy their lives for a while longer.

10: 98; 21: 87-88; 37: 139-148; 68: 48-50

18 The Family of 'Imran, Zechariah and John (Zakariyyah and Yahya)

'Imran and his wife were from a religious and pious family of Israelites. They were also related to the family of Zechariah who was among the long line of Israelites' great family of prophets. When 'Imran's wife was pregnant she vowed that she would give the child in the service of Allah. But when a girl was born she was concerned about fulfilling her pledge. She named her Mary (Maryam) and committed her offspring to Allah for protection from the accursed Satan. Allah graciously accepted Mary for His service. Priests of the Temple drew lots of writing pens to decide Mary's guardianship and Zechariah was given this honour.

Mary grew up in the sanctuary guided by Zechariah in piety and grace. Whenever Zechariah visited her chamber to see her, he found her supplied with sustenance. He asked her how this came to her. Mary replied, "It is from Allah. He provides sustenance to whom He wills."

As Zechariah was growing old and weak he was anxious that he should have a successor to continue his noble work. He was fearful that his evil kinsmen were not worthy of carrying on his mission after his death. When he saw Allah's favours being bestowed on Mary, he pleaded to Allah seeking His special grace and an heir. He was told of the good news of the birth of a son to be named John. He was not sure as to how he could have a son in old age. Allah reassured him and at his request for a sign of this favour he was told that he would not be able to speak for three days. Thereupon,

Zechariah came out from the sanctuary and directed his people by gestures to extol the Lord's glory constantly.

Eventually, his son, John, was born who was endowed with wisdom, compassion and righteousness. He was exceedingly pious, cherished by his parents, and never was insolent or rebellious. When John grew up, he was instructed by Allah to uphold the Book with great strength and to call the Israelites to the path of righteousness. However, as his teachings offended the hierarchy of the ruling class, he was martyred.

3:33-41; 19:2-15

19 Mary (Maryam)

Once the angels visited Mary and told her that Allah had chosen her and exalted her above all the women in the world so she should keep up her devotion and worship. Then, they gave her the tidings that she would give birth to a child whose name would be the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary (al-Masih, 'Isa, Ibn Maryam). He would be highly honoured in this world and the next and would be in the company of those nearest to Allah. He would speak from the cradle and when he had grown to maturity, would be among the righteous. Mary was perturbed being a virgin as to how she would have a son. The angel told her that this was Allah's will and that when Allah decides something, He merely says: "Be" and it is. Allah would give him wisdom and teach him the Torah and the Gospel (Injil) and would appoint him as a Messenger to the Israelites.

Then Mary conceived the child. Later, she withdrew to a far-off place and gave birth to Jesus. She was very upset, but the angels informed her that there was a stream of water for her below and if she were to shake the palm-tree she would have ripe dates. All this she should eat and drink and grieve not and she should vow not to speak to anyone.

When she came to her people, they accused her of committing a monstrous thing. Mary just pointed to the child who cried out: "Verily I am Allah's servant. He has granted me the Book and made me a Prophet. He has blessed me and enjoined Prayer and has given purifying alms as long as I live. Peace be upon me the day I was born and the day I will die and the day I will be raised up alive."

3: 42-48; 19: 16-33

20 Jesus ('Isa)

When Jesus grew up to be a young man he, like the earlier Prophets, said: "O Children of Israel, I am Allah's Messenger to you, I verify the Torah which has come before me, and I give you the glad tiding of a Messenger who shall come after me, his name being Ahmed (another name of Muhammad)." Allah gave him the Gospel and supported him with the Holy Spirit. He performed many miracles by the permission of Allah such as healing the incurably sick, restoring sight to the blind, creating clay birds and breathing life into them, as well as raising the dead. He also informed people about what they had eaten and what treasures they had stored in their homes. He said: "I have come to confirm the truth of whatever there still remains of the Torah, and to make lawful to you some of the things which have been forbidden to you. I have come to you with a sign from your Lord; so have fear of Allah and obey me. Surely, Allah is my Lord and your Lord; so serve Him alone. This is the straight way."

Yet all these wonderful miracles could not convince the Israelites who declared this as pure magic. When Jesus sensed rejection from the Israelites, he asked: "Who are my helpers in the way of Allah?" His few disciples affirmed faith in him and testified to their submission to Allah. They requested Jesus to ask Allah to send down for them a table spread with food as a sign from Heaven as they wished to eat from it and thus affirm full faith in him. On Jesus' request Allah told them: "Indeed, I shall send this down to you but whoever of you disbelieve thereafter will be severely punished."

The Israelites could not bear Jesus' teachings and, after rejecting his message and dubbing his miracles as magic, plotted to kill him. He was betrayed by a conspiracy but Allah protected him and countered their scheme. However, they claimed that they had killed Jesus but they neither slew him nor crucified him but the matter was made dubious to them. In fact, Allah raised him to Himself as He is Almighty and All-Wise.

4: 156-159; 5: 14-18, 46, 68-75, 110-116; 9: 30-31; 43: 57-65; 61: 6, 14

21 The Violation of the Covenant by the Israelites and the Second Destruction of Jerusalem

As the years rolled by, the pious, who were sincere in their faith and who used to fall down in prostration weeping when the words of their Lord were recited, all passed away. They were succeeded by a people who neglected their Prayers and pursued their lusts. They broke the sacred Covenant which their elders had solemnly entered into from the time of Moses. Their priests started distorting the Scriptures and concealing those parts of it which did not suit them. As concealing the clear teachings and true guidance is a great sin, this brought about Allah's curse on them. They used to write out the Scriptures with their own hands and falsely claimed that this was from Allah just to make money. They confounded the truth by overlaying it with falsehood.

Owing to the Israelites' persistent haughtiness, their hearts were sealed. Even upon seeing Allah's signs their masses did not believe in them; instead they rejected the right path and chose the path of error. Their Covenant laid down that they would not shed one another's blood and would not exile one another from their homelands, yet they indulged in these activities and even demanded ransom from captives. Every time their prophets brought Allah's message to them by way of reminder they acted arrogantly, called them liars and even killed some of them. For this, they were cursed by their Prophets David, Jesus and others.

The result was that Allah's retribution overtook them and degradation in the present life became their destiny and severe chastisement in the Hereafter awaits them. As punishment for their repeated violations of the Covenant and their rejection of Allah's Prophets John and Jesus and contriving to have them killed, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem completely thereby driving the Israelites out of Palestine.

Since then they have remained dispersed throughout the world, and this for nearly two thousand years.

2: 40-122; 17: 2-7

22 The Christians

Whereas the Jews persecuted Jesus, those who accepted his teachings followed the right path. Jesus' disciples were humble, sincere and a devoted group of people. They had tenderness and mercy in their hearts, diligently trying to follow Jesus' teachings. But they could not match the skills of those who later on converted to a new faith, calling themselves the 'Christians'. They claimed that Jesus was crucified and rose to life again. They invented the doctrine of Trinity saying that Allah is one of the three and Jesus was Allah's son whereas the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary was only Allah's Messenger, and His Command that was conveyed unto Mary and a spirit from Him. Their blasphemy was of such a magnitude that the heavens nearly burst, and the earth almost split and the mountains all but fell down in sudden collapse – that they should ascribe to the All-Merciful a son. Whereas the whole issue of attributing divinity to Jesus is resolved by stating: "The case of Jesus in the sight of Allah is the same as the case of Adam. He created him from dust and then said to him, 'Be' and he was". However, his followers lost Jesus' teachings and attributed divinity to him.

The Christians also deviated from the right path when they invented monasticism, a system not prescribed for them. Upholding the standard of truth requires courage, resistance to evil, firmness, constant struggle and striving. By renouncing the world and engaging in perpetual formal prayers in isolation they lost sight of the real message of Jesus. Although they adopted monasticism to seek Allah's pleasure, this was still against natural human instincts.

Furthermore, many of them could not observe the strict regime properly, frequently violating the strict code of celibacy and, thus, straying from the right path.

On the Day of Judgement Allah would ask Jesus whether he told the people to take him and his mother as gods beside Allah. Jesus would deny this, saying how he could have said such a thing which he had no right to say. Then, Jesus would say that he only said what Allah had commanded him to convey to his followers. It was simply that they should serve Him alone. Then he would plead with Allah for the forgiveness of his followers by saying: "If You chastise them they are Your servants; and if You forgive them, You are All-Mighty, All-Wise."

4: 171-172; 19: 88-93; 3: 59-60; 57: 27; 5: 116-119.

23 Muhammad

Muhammad was a descendant of Abraham through his son, Ishmael, who was settled in Mecca. He belonged to the financially poor but politically strong and noble clan of Banu Hashim from the tribe of Quraysh, who held the very high office of levying taxes and providing pilgrims with food and water. As the custodian of the Ka'bah, the House of Allah, that was the centre of pilgrimage for all Arabia, the Quraysh ranked higher in dignity and power than any other tribe. They were also traders and used to travel north in summer and south of the country in winter. Mecca was an inviolable city, hence the Quraysh had no fear of being attacked and, as keepers of the Ka'bah, their trade caravans travelled freely throughout Arabia.

Although Muhammad was born an orphan, Allah provided him shelter within his extended family. He grew up in poverty, tending goats and sheep to earn his livelihood, as was done by most prophets. His uncle and guardian Abu Talib also took him with his trade caravans to Syria. Hearing about Muhammad's honesty and uprightness, a rich widow, Khadijah, approached him and appointed him her business manager, and later, impressed by his integrity, married him. She remained his close friend and companion throughout until her death 25 years later. They had six children, of whom four daughters survived.

Muhammad was a truthful, trustworthy and compassionate person. His integrity and sense of justice disquieted him as he looked at Arabian society where idolatry was prevalent and injustice was meted out to the poor and vulnerable sections of society. He totally disassociated himself from idol worship and doing anything immoral. His uprightness and honesty earned him the titles of the Trustworthy and the Honest.

Muhammad as the Messenger

At a young age Muhammad participated in a chivalrous pact for the establishment of justice and protection for the weak and oppressed. He would also regularly retire to nearby Mount Hira and spend time in meditation and reflection. He was burdened with sorrow and grief as well as anxiety and concern for his fellow human beings. He was searching for the right way. After some time, one night during the month of Ramadan, an angel appeared to him and asked him to read whereupon he replied that he did not know how to read. Then, the following verses were recited by the angel and which Muhammad was asked to repeat:

Recite in the name of your Lord Who created
– created man from a clot of congealed blood.

Recite and your Lord is Most Generous, Who taught by the
pen, taught man what he did not know.

This strange experience was very frightening for Muhammad but he was reassured by his wife that he, being a generous and honest person, would not suffer any harm from Allah. He was also told that he should warn his people that they should only worship the One God. Furthermore, that they should help the poor, feed the hungry and befriend the destitute.

In a later revelation, he was given further instructions to convey the message of Islam first to his immediate family and then to his circle of friends and his tribe as a whole.

Only a few people however accepted his message; as for the majority, they not only ridiculed him but frequently opposed him. As the years went by, more and more people started to accept Islam, in turn facing bitter opposition from their families who doubted that the Qur'an was the Word of Allah. They mocked Muhammad saying that if he were Allah's Messenger then why did he eat food as other human beings did and walk about the streets as they did? Why had he not been given abundant wealth and why were the angels not sent as well? In essence, they branded Muhammad as a liar, a poet, a soothsayer, a man-possessed, and accused him of fabricating the Qur'an himself. By the same token though they could not understand how an uneducated person could compose such a sublime, beautiful and powerful work. Hence, when they were challenged to produce anything similar to the Qur'an they could not match Allah's Word.

96: 1-5; 74: 1-7; 26: 214-215; 25: 4-8; 21: 5; 52: 30-33; 2: 23

Persecution and Migration

Later on, the opposition to Muhammad grew fierce, with he and his followers not only suffering verbal abuse, mockery, torture, but also being beaten up and made to lie on burning coal fires. Yet these sufferings only served to strengthen their faith and resolve. When this became unbearable, the Prophet told some of his followers to migrate to Abyssinia where there was a good Christian king who would afford them refuge.

As the unbelievers came to realize that the tactics they employed to check the tide of Islam were ineffective, a conference was called that advocated a total boycott of the Muslims and their supporters. For three years the Muslims – men, women and children – were confined in a valley where they endured great hardship, prevented as they were from buying anything in the open market. Their plight moved some kind people to smuggle food and clothing to them. As even this could not break the Muslims' resolve, the boycott was brought to an end.

Facing rejection in Mecca, Muhammad tried to seek support in Ta'if, another city. However, here too he was verbally and physically abused and returned dejected. Ten years had passed, yet the persecution continued relentlessly. The Prophet asked his followers not to retaliate but to bear these sufferings patiently. To signal though that change was in the offing, one night the Prophet was awakened and taken by Archangel Gabriel first to Jerusalem, where in its blessed precincts he led all the prophets in prayer. From there, he ascended to the seventh heaven and was made to see the heavenly world. There, for the second time, he saw Archangel Gabriel at a distance of two bows in his original form by the lote-tree near Paradise. His other spiritual experience was when he saw some of the greatest signs of His Lord.

29: 56-60; 4: 100; 17: 1; 53: 5-18

Muhammad in Medina

Soon after Muhammad's night journey, at the time of annual pilgrimage a few people from the northern city of Yathrib accepted Islam and the following year many more converted, and thus a new opening was made. They pledged their loyalty to the Prophet inviting him to migrate from Mecca. Slowly the suffering Meccan Muslims started to migrate and set up a new life for themselves in Yathrib. For their part, though, the Meccans could not bear to see the Muslims living peacefully and the message of Islam gaining ground. They, therefore, hatched a plan to kill the Prophet. Informed of the plot by Allah, Muhammad was told to leave Mecca. Thus, one night in the company of his friend Abu Bakr he left for Yathrib. However, the Quraysh sent scores of people to intercept him while he was hiding in a cave, but they were unable to establish his whereabouts. Before arriving in Yathrib, Muhammad stayed for a few days in Quba and built a mosque there. Eventually, the Prophet arrived in Yathrib to the great delight of the people and in his honour the city was re-named Madinat al-Nabi (City of the Prophet), in short, Medina.

The first thing the Prophet did after arriving in Medina was to establish the bond of brotherhood between the immigrants from Mecca and the host community, who were called Helpers. One person from the migrants was made the brother of one from amongst the Helpers, who offered to share all that they possessed with the migrants.

Thus the Muslims were forged into a close-knit community of faith

Their first priority was to build a mosque and the Mosque of the Prophet, as it was named, was so consecrated to worship Allah. Then the Constitution of Medina was drawn up to forge unity among the different tribes as well as the Jews living around Medina to defend the city against invaders.

17: 80-81; 9: 108-109; 8: 72-75

Armed Resistance

The Meccans, however, were still bent on annihilating Islam, which was flourishing in Medina. They, thus, marched with a huge army towards Medina camping outside at the place called Badr where the battle took place. With Allah's help the Muslims under the leadership of the Prophet succeeded in defeating this mighty army. As a result, the Muslims were able to collect a large booty as well as prisoners of war.

The following year, to avenge their defeat, the Meccans put together a still larger army and again marched on Medina. The two sides met outside the city near Mount Uhud. The Muslims' initial victory was reversed, however, as those who the Prophet had appointed to safeguard a vital mountain pass neglected their assignment and started to collect the war booty. The Meccans, seeing the gap in the Muslims' defence, mounted a counter-attack yet still they could not take the advantage and clinch victory.

Apart from the external threats to the nascent Islamic state, many opportunists accepted Islam only to undermine it from within. These hypocrites, many from among the Jewish ranks, employed a

variety of different tactics. Some accepted Islam for a few days and then renounced the faith thereby creating doubts among the newly converted people of Medina. Others spread false rumours or maligned the Prophet's family by implicating them in the committing of indecent acts. Some even established a separate mosque to conspire and cause division among the faithful.

Then, after a few years, the Meccans negotiated deals with the Jews, the Bedouin tribes and hypocrites within Medina to make a final assault on the Muslims. To repulse this attack the Muslims therefore began digging ditches all round Medina by way of defence. After laying siege to Medina for 25 days, due to inner dissension, lack of supplies and bad weather the Meccans were forced to withdraw. For their treachery and for breaking the covenant they had made with the Prophet, the Jews were expelled from Medina in a series of expeditions.

8: 7-71; 47: 1-38; 3: 121-189; 9: 107-108; 33: 9-27; 59: 2-17

The Peace Treaty

The following year the Prophet saw a vision that he was performing the Umrah (minor pilgrimage) to Mecca. Hence, to fulfil this prophesy he embarked on a visit to the Ka'bah with many of his Companions. As pilgrims, they were all unarmed but nevertheless the Quraysh, against all established and accepted tradition, refused them entry into Mecca. The Quraysh did, however, agree to sign a peace pact with the Prophet whereby they promised he would be able to perform the pilgrimage the following year.

This peace treaty gave Muhammad the opportunity to convey the message of Islam to all tribes across Arabia. Thus, it was indeed a clear victory.

48: 1-29

The Conquest of Mecca

During this period, a delegation of Christians from Najran in the Yemen visited the Prophet in Medina. They were provided with accommodation in the mosque. They were challenged to a solemn meeting so as to determine who was telling the truth about the status of Jesus by praying humbly together to Allah and invoking His wrath and curse on those who lied. However, this Christian delegation refused to take part in the joint prayer to establish the truth regarding Jesus' divinity and departed.

After only a couple of years, the Quraysh broke their treaty with the Muslims. To deal with this, the Prophet and his Companions marched on Mecca, which was conquered without bloodshed as most of the Meccans surrendered without any resistance. The Prophet then forgave all of them who had been his and the Muslims, bitter enemies for a long time.

The Byzantine Empire was the eastern half of the Roman Empire, whose borders stretched up to northern Arabia. It now felt threatened by the growing strength of the Muslims. To pre-empt their attack, the Prophet marched to the northern border. Seeing his and his follower's courage and timely response, the enemy lost heart and withdrew.

3: 61; 110: 1-3; 57: 10; 9: 38-57

Muhammad's Last Pilgrimage

Muhammad performed his only Hajj (Pilgrimage to Mecca) in the tenth year after his migration to Medina. In the Plain of Arafat, he gave a sermon of unsurpassable beauty and lasting value: "No person has any right to lord over another person; all human beings are equal whatever their origin, colour or nationality. Surely the noblest among you are the most God-fearing amongst you." He asked those who had assembled there to convey the message of Islam to others as no other prophet would come after him. This responsibility now rests with the Muslims.

A few months later, Muhammad died and was buried in the house in which he lived within the precincts of the Mosque in Medina.

Muhammad's Character

Muhammad possessed a character of exquisite beauty and charm. He was merciful, kind and compassionate. Indeed he was sent forth as nothing but mercy to the people of the whole world. His conduct was of the most exalted standard of moral excellence, being the embodiment of the teachings of the Qur'an. Indeed, in him, there is a beautiful pattern of conduct for believers to emulate. His love for them was immense plus he was ardently desirous of their welfare and became distressed if they suffered any loss. Hence, the believers were told that as Allah and His angels blessed the Prophet, they, in turn, should also invoke peace and blessings upon him whenever his name is mentioned.

He did not scold anyone, nor did he take revenge on anyone. He used to forgive and pardon those who oppressed him. He never abused anyone. He never hit anyone, not even an animal. He never refused any request unless of course it was illegal. His face was a smiling countenance, gentle and generous. This was nothing less than Allah's mercy for had he been hard-hearted, people surely would have scattered from his company. He was neither bad tempered nor narrow-minded. Nor did he become agitated over frivolous things. He never uttered a bad word. Nor did he find fault with others. If he disliked anything, he would ignore it but not show his approval either. People who knew his disposition realised from his facial expressions what his intentions were. He refrained from controversial debates, unnecessary talking and unrelated issues. He also used to consult his Companions on all major issues.

His life, sufferings and triumphs remain a symbol of modesty, faithful devotion, service to Allāh and humanity, indeed a life example for others to follow.

Thus Muhammad's sayings and actions, called the Sunnah, are the second source of the Islamic Shari'ah.

68: 4; 21: 107; 33: 21

24 Some Pious People

Luqman

The sage Luqman was a celebrated personality in Arabic literature for his wise maxims. Some of these are narrated in the Qur'an in a specific chapter Surah 31, named after him.

Luqman while advising his son said, "Do not associate others with Allah in His Divinity as this is a mighty wrong. Son, establish Prayer, command all that is good and forbid all that is evil, and endure with patience whatever affliction befalls you. Surely this is a thing requiring great resolve. Son, Allah will bring forth everything even if it be as small as the grain of a mustard seed even though it be hidden inside a rock or anywhere in the heavens or earth. Allah is Most Subtle, All-Aware. Do not contemptuously turn your face away from people, nor tread haughtily upon earth. Allah does not love the arrogant and the vainglorious. Be moderate in your stride and lower your voice. Verily the most disgusting of all voices is the braying of the donkey."

31: 12-19

Dhu al-Qarnayn

It is impossible to try to identify the exact personage of Dhu al-Qarnayn in an historical context or to apply all the details which the Qur'an has given about him.

Allah granted him power in the land and endowed him with all manner of resources. Using these resources and power, Dhu al-Qarnayn embarked upon three different campaigns until he reached the end of habitation in each direction.

In his first expedition to the farthest limit in the West, when he assumed authority over a turbulent and unruly people, he dealt with them justly, severely chastising the wrongdoers and treating the righteous well.

In his second expedition, he reached the farthest limit in the East, which marked the end of the civilized world. There, he encountered a nation of primitives who did not even have the skill to pitch tents and thus were exposed to the vagaries of the weather. He left these alone, making no attempt to interfere in their affairs.

His third campaign was towards a place between the two mountains where he encountered a nation that was constantly being harassed by a violent and unruly tribe. They said, "O Dhu al-Qarnayn, Gog and Magog are spreading corruption in this land. So shall we pay you taxes on the understanding that you will set up a barrier between us and them?" He agreed, saying that Allah had given him enough resources and he, with their labour would erect a rampart of iron strengthened with molten copper between the two parties such that Gog and Magog could neither scale nor pierce it. However, when the time of Allah's promise does come, He will level the rampart to the ground.

In all his campaigns, Dhu al-Qarnayn demonstrated the utmost sagacity and wisdom, dealing with all the problems he faced with justice, equity and humility. He served mankind selflessly and without arrogance.

A Man in the Wilderness (*probably Ezekiel-Hizaqil*)

A person passed by a town that was all in ruins. He wondered how Allah would restore life to this town. Allah caused him to die for a hundred years and then raised him up again. When he was asked how long he had slept, he said, "Perhaps a day or part of a day." Allah told him that he stayed in this state for a hundred years and to ascertain the truth he saw that whilst his food and drink had not deteriorated his ass was now just a skeleton. Then Allah restored the ass back to life. When he saw this, the man proclaimed that Allah has power over all things.

2: 259

The People of the Cave

There were some young believers (*most probably Christians*) who made a commitment to faith in the One God as their only Lord. Allah increased them in guidance and strengthened their hearts. This commitment led them to stand up for their faith and to challenge the prevailing Godlessness.

They faced an oppressive and dominant culture which was out either to assimilate or eliminate them. To avoid this oppressive regime, they took refuge in a cave with their dog hoping that Allah would extend His mercy upon them and help them to solve their affairs. It was an isolated and fearsome place and no one disturbed them whilst they slept there.

When they awoke, they thought that perhaps they had slept only for a day or part of a day. One of them was sent to buy some wholesome food stealthily thereby not revealing their whereabouts. However they did not realize at this point that they had slept for over 300 years and that the oppressive regime they had challenged was now replaced by believers (*followers of Jesus Christ*). When one who had gone out presented a coin dating from the time of an earlier king the people were baffled and eventually established that these youths were believers from an earlier century. Allah had made this happen to show the people of the city that His promise is true and that there is absolutely no doubt that the Day of Resurrection will come to pass.

The people of the city disputed among themselves concerning about the People of the Cave. Some wanted to build a wall over the cave. In the end however, they agreed to build a place of worship over the cave.

18: 9-26

25 Some Wicked People

People of the Town

In earlier times, to guide and reform the people of a town, Allah sent two of His Messengers who preached to them and called them to the way of righteousness. The people, however, flatly rejected both of them as liars. Then to strengthen them, Allah sent a third Messenger as well. The people of the town still said that they were only human beings like themselves and that they were pretending to be God's Messengers. In return, the Messengers said that it is only Allah Who knows the truth. The people then accused them of bringing an evil omen with them and threatened to kill them. The Messengers replied that Allah was their witness, that they were not liars and as for the evil omen the people had brought this on themselves.

In the meantime, when a pious man living at the far end of the town learnt that the people were denying the Messengers, he came running and told his people that they should follow the Messengers who did not ask for any recompense and who were rightly guided. As for their deities, they could not bring about any adversity upon him. Rather, he believed in the One Lord, so they should listen to him and the Messengers.

Eventually they killed him and he was told, "Enter Paradise." The man exclaimed, "I wish my people would know how Allah has forgiven me and placed me among the honoured ones."

36: 13-32

The People of Sheba (Saba)

Sheba was the name of a community that lived in southern Yemen in fertile land. They were highly civilized and were able to harness their water resources. They built a natural dam between two mountains creating a great wall down the valley, with a controlled opening. In this way, they were able to retain water in great quantities, which they used as they needed. Thus they had lush gardens and splendidly fertile land, which gave them beauty and affluence. They were commanded to make full use of what had been granted to them and to thank Allah Who had blessed them with every good thing.

When they failed to show their gratitude to Allah, He took away their source of affluence and let loose raging, stone-carrying torrents which destroyed their dam, the water from which flooded the whole area. With the destruction of their dam, the land dried up. Instead of beautiful gardens they now had only a desert in which only a few wild trees grew bearing bitter fruits.

Yet Sheba's people did not pay any heed to this first warning. Nor did they change their attitude and revert to Allah, seeking His forgiveness and mercy and appealing to Him to give them back their comfortable lives. They had prominent towns between a national highway and there were well-measured stages between them so that they could travel with ease during the day and night in perfect security. But they prayed, "Lord, make the stages of our journey longer." Their prayers were answered by inflicting on them

the disgrace of becoming scattered throughout Arabia. In this way, they lost all their prestige and became nothing more than a tale told of a bygone people.

34: 15-21

The People of the Pit

The incident referred to here is probably a report of a frightful persecution inflicted on the Christians by their tyrannical enemies in Najran, Yemen.

The tyrants tried to force the believers away from their faith. When the believers refused, the tyrants then lit a great fire in a pit they had dug, and threw them into it. The believers were thus burnt to death in front of a large crowd that had gathered to witness this atrocity. The tyrants sat by, amused by the believers' sufferings. They took vengeance on them for no reason other than that they believed in the Almighty, to whom all praise is due. Allah promised the perpetrators of this crime the chastisement of burning in Hell.

85: 4-11

The People of the Elephant

This incident took place only 50 days before Muhammad's birth. Abrahah, the Christian ruler of the Abyssinian kingdom of Yemen, led an expedition to Mecca with 60,000 troops. He was fired with the resolve to destroy the Ka'bah.

His army had also brought along some elephants. When Abrahah reached a place that lies between Muzdalifah and Mina, there suddenly appeared swarms of birds carrying stones in their beaks and claws, which they pelted upon the Abyssinian army. Anyone who was hit by these stones soon started to rot and his flesh would start falling away from his bones. Thus the whole army was destroyed. The Arabs accepted that the destruction of the people of the elephants had been brought about by Allah's will and power.

105: 1-5

26 Some Parables

Allah as the Light

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. His Light in the Universe may be likened to a niche and within is a lamp, and the lamp is in the crystal which shines in star-like brilliance. It is lit from the oil of a blessed olive tree that is neither eastern nor western. Its oil well nigh glows forth of itself though no fire touched it: Light upon Light. Allah guides to His Light whom He wills. Allah sets forth parables to make people understand. Allah knows everything.

24: 35

A Good Word and a Corrupt Word

Do you not see how Allah has set forth this parable of a good word of faith? It is like a good tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and whose branches reach the sky. It yields its fruit in every season with the command of its Lord. Allah sets forth parables for mankind that they may take heed. Thus, the parable of a corrupt word is that of a corrupt tree, uprooted from the surface of the earth, wholly unable to endure. Thus, through a firm word of faith, Allah grants firmness to the believers both in this world and in the Hereafter. As for the wrongdoers, Allah lets them go astray.

14: 24-27

A Rich Man and a Pauper

Allah had bestowed on a rich man plenty of wealth in the form of vineyards, orchards and other worldly possessions.

He boasted to a pauper that he had greater wealth and that he did not believe that this would ever perish. He doubted the coming of the Day of Resurrection and even if it were to happen he would surely find a better place than this. The pauper reminded him that his beginning was just from a drop of sperm and that Allah had endowed him with all that he had and yet he denied the divinity of his Lord. He should be acknowledging His favours by saying, Whatever Allah wills shall come to pass, for there is no power, save with Allah.

Though I am less fortunate yet Allah will give me something better than your vineyards and send a calamity from the heavens to make it a barren waste." Eventually all the rich man's wealth was destroyed and when he saw this he regretted denying the divinity of his Lord.

18: 32-44

The Worldly Life

The life of this world is merely sport, diversion and adornment. It is an object of your boasting with one another and rivalry in the multiplication of riches and offspring. Its parable is like the luxuriant vegetation which flourished due to rain water. It delights the farmers and they believe that they have full control over their lands. But after some time, it turns yellow and then crumbles away, becoming stubble blown about by the wind. The life of this world is nothing but delusion.

18: 45; 57: 20

Disbelief in Allah

Here is a parable for those who disbelieved in Allah: their deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty person thinks is water until he approaches it only to find that it is nothing. Instead, he has found that Allah was with him and He renders him his wicked account in full. Or its similitude is that of the depths of darkness upon an abysmal sea, covered by waves and above which are more waves; and above which is cloud, creating darkness piled one upon another; when one puts forth one's hand, one scarcely sees it. He to whom Allah assigns no light, he will have no light.

24: 39-41

The Helplessness of Idols and others besides Allah

O people, a parable is set forth: pay heed to it. Indeed, those being whom you call upon apart from Allah can never create even a fly even if all come together to do so. Rather, if a fly were to snatch anything away from them, they would not be able to recover it. Feeble are seekers and the sought.

22: 73-74

The parable of those who took others than Allah as their protector to give them shelter is that of a spider who builds a house for refuge; but the frailest of all houses is the spider's house, if the only knew.

29: 41-42

Allah set forth a parable of one who is a slave owned by another and has no power over anything and there is another who has plenty of resources, which he can spend as he likes. Can both be equal?

There is another parable of two men, one of them is dumb and has no power over anything and he is a burden on his master. Can such a person be equal to one who enjoins justice and follows the right path?

16: 75-76

The example of praying to anyone other than Allah is that of a person who stretches out his hands to water, asking it to reach his mouth, although water has no power to reach his mouth. The prayers of the unbelievers are nothing but waste.

13: 14

Have you taken beside Allah as your protector those who do not have the power to benefit or hurt even themselves? Can the blind and the seeing be deemed equal? Or, can light and darkness be deemed equal? If that is not so, then have those whom they associate with Allah in His divinity ever created anything like what Allah has created?

13: 16

A Misguided Person

The parable of one who after receiving guidance so that he could be upright and pious but who turned away and was caught up by Satan and led astray is that of the dog who lolls out his tongue whether you chase him or leave him alone.

7: 175-176

The parable of the deeds of the disbelievers is like ashes upon which blows a severe wind on a stormy day. They shall find no reward for their deeds.

14: 13

The Mindset of Hypocrites

Hypocrites are like the person who after kindling a fire illuminates the surrounding area yet from whom Allah took away the light of their perception and left them in utter darkness so that they could not find the right way. They are deaf, dumb and blind – never shall they return to guidance.

Or they are like those who encounter a violent rainstorm accompanied by thunder and lightning, which leaves them in utter darkness. They thrust their fingers into their ears in fear of death and are apprehensive that lightning may snatch their sight. Whenever it gleams a while for them they walk a little but when it suddenly darkens all about them, they stand still. And had Allah so willed, He, most surely, could have taken away their hearing and their sight altogether.

2: 17-20

Spending in the Way of Allah

The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like that of a grain that sprouts seven ears, and in every ear there is a hundred grains. Thus, Allah blesses the action of whomsoever He wills.

The example of those who spend their wealth to show off and even after giving in charity stress their benevolence and cause hurt is like a thin coating of earth on a rock, which after a heavy shower of rain washes it away leaving the rock bare. Such people derive no gain from their charity. Whereas the example of those who spend their wealth single-mindedly to please Allah is that of a garden on a high ground. If heavy rain falls it brings forth its produce twofold. Even if there is no heavy rainfall, then a light shower suffices.

2: 261-266

27 Some Maxims

Surely in remembrance of Allah is where hearts find satisfaction.

13: 28

Allah does not change a people's condition unless they change their inner selves.

13: 11

Ask those who possess knowledge if you do not know.

16: 43

Are those who know equal to those who do not know? Only those endowed with understanding take heed.

39: 9

Do not become like the woman who after having painstakingly spun her yarn, caused it to tear into pieces.

16: 92

Surely the gates of heaven shall not be opened to those who reject Allah's signs with arrogance nor will they enter Paradise until the camel passes through the eye of a needle.

7: 40

Despair not of the mercy of Allah, Who forgives all sins. He is All-Forgiving, and Most Merciful.

39: 53

Surely We have created man, and We know the promptings of his heart, and We are nearer to him than even his jugular vein.

50: 1

He is with you wherever you are. Allah sees all that you do.

57: 4

Wherever you might be, death will overtake you even though you may be in lofty towers.

4: 78

Surely he is successful who has cleansed his soul. And miserable is he who has buried it.

91: 9-10

Abstain from sin, be it open or secret. Indeed those who commit sin shall surely be punished for all they have done.

6: 120

Those who strive hard in Our cause, We shall surely guide them to Our Ways.

29: 69

28 Basic Beliefs

We believe in Allah, and in what has been revealed to us and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the descendants of Jacob and in what was given to Moses and Jesus and in what the other prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are those who submit to Allah.

The Messenger believes, and so do the believers, in Allah, in His angels, in His Books, in His Messengers and in the Last Day.

2: 136, 285

Allah

The Oneness of Allah

Allah is One and Unique. He is in need of none and of Whom all are in need;

He neither begot any nor was He begotten, and none is comparable to Him.

112: 1-4

The Might and Glory of Allah

Allah, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsisting by Whom all subsist, there is no god but He. Neither slumber seizes Him, nor sleep; to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. Who is there who might intercede with Him save with His leave? He knows what lies before them and what is hidden from them, whereas they cannot attain to anything of His knowledge save what He wills them to attain. His Dominion extends over the

heavens and the earth, and their upholding wearies Him not. He is All-High, All-Glorious.

2: 255

All that is in the heavens and the earth extols the glory of Allah. He is the Most Mighty, the Most Wise. To Him are all matters referred for judgement. He gives life and causes death, and He has power over everything. He is the First and the Last, and the Manifest and the Hidden, and He has knowledge of everything. He is with you wherever you are. Allah sees all that you do and He fully knows all that is hidden in people's breasts.

57: 1-6

The Most Beautiful Names of Allah

He is Allah: there is no god but He; the Knower of the unseen and the manifest, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate, the King, the Holy, the All-Peace, the Giver of security, the Overseer, the Most Mighty, the Overpowering, the All-Great. Exalted be He from whatever they associate with Him. He is the Planner, Executor and Fashioner of creation. His are the most beautiful names. Whatever is in the heavens and the earth extols His Glory. He is the Most Wise.

59: 22-23

No visual perception can encompass Him, even though He encompasses all visual perception. He is the All-Subtle, the All-Aware.

6: 103

The Signs of Allah

To guide those who use their reason to this Truth there are many signs in the structure of the heavens and the earth, in the constant alternation of night and day, in the vessels which speed across the sea carrying goods that are of profit to people, in the water which Allah sends down from the sky and thereby quickens the earth after it was dead, and disperses over it all manner of animals, and in the changing courses of the winds and the clouds pressed into service between heaven and earth.

Truly it is Allah Who causes the grain and the fruit-kernel to sprout. He brings forth the living from the dead and brings forth the dead from the living.

It is He Who causes the dawn to split forth, and has ordained the night for repose, and the sun and the moon for reckoning time.

It is He Who has made for you the stars that you may follow the right direction in the darkness of the land and the sea.

It is He Who created you out of a single being, and appointed for each of you a place of stay in life and a resting place after death.

He has created mates for you from your own kind that you may find peace in them and He has set between you love and mercy.

It is He Who has created the diversity of your tongues and colours.

And of His Signs is your sleeping at night and your seeking His bounty during the day.

And of His Signs is that He shows you lightning, arousing both fear and hope, and sends down water from the sky and revives the earth after it is dead. Indeed there are Signs in this for those who use their reason.

2: 164; 6: 95-103; 30: 20-25.

The Angels

The angels belong to the world that cannot be perceived by human senses. They are created from light and are invisible to human beings, yet they do have forms and bodies. They are Allah's message-bearers, having a set of wings. They are in total submission to Allah and are incapable of committing any sin. They are continuously engaged in Allah's praise. Each one of them has been assigned a specific task to perform in the governance of the Universe. The number of angels is not mentioned; four of them, however, are well known, being nearest to Allah:

The first and the foremost is Gabriel (also called the Holy Spirit-Ruh al-Quds). He is held in honour and is mighty and most trustworthy. He performed the most important task of bringing the Message of Allah to His Messengers. He no longer performs this duty as the institution of prophethood came to an end with the Prophet Muhammad. The second angel by Allah's command will blow the Trumpet on the Day of Resurrection and bring the present system and order of the world to an end. The third is Angel Michael (Mika'il) who performs various functions by Allah's command. And finally is the Angel of Death. He has been appointed to take people's souls.

Other angels mentioned are the two kind and honourable scribes attached to every human being, and as their names imply they record good and bad deeds. The angels are a credible link between Allah and His creatures. Being of spirit in essence, they are close to Allah. Being a creation of Allah, however, they share a common link with other creatures. The pagan Arabs belief that the angels are Allah's daughters and, thus, have the power of intercession is entirely baseless. Though invisible, the angels approach believers with messages of strength and encouragement. They pray to Allah on behalf of them and ask Him for their forgiveness. They support believers both in this life and in the Hereafter.

53: 6; 80: 13-16; 81: 19-21; 82: 10-12; 40: 7-9; 2: 97

The Messenger and the Scripture

All prophets brought the same message from Allah that people should believe in the Oneness of Allah and follow His guidance sent through His prophets. To attain salvation, they should also follow the guidance given in the Scriptures sent through His prophets. They were sent as bearers of glad tidings and as warners so that people may have no plea against Allah on the Day of Judgement that they were ignorant of His guidance. Believers are required to obey, love, respect and honour their prophets.

After Adam, a succession of prophets came to renew Allah's guidance, which had either been lost or had become mixed up with human intrusions. First, before the appearance of a prophet in any nation, conditions that would be conducive to the acceptance of his message were created. This was usually carried

out by subjecting the nations concerned to a variety of afflictions and punishments so that they should be inclined to heed the words of warning and to turn to Allah in humility. If the people continued to refrain from embracing the truth they were, however, subjected to another kind of test – that of affluence. This last test signalled the beginning of their destruction. Rolling in abundant wealth and luxury and refusing to heed the moral admonitions of their prophets, they thought that there was no Lord above them Who could call them to account. This made them arrogant and vain, leading them to Allah's punishment.

The prophets were sent to all nations and they preached in the languages of their own people. The names of only 26 are mentioned. The Scripture given to Abraham was called *Suhuf*. Moses was given the *Torah (Tawrat)*, David the *Psalms (Zubur)* and Jesus the *Gospel (Injil)*. The last Messenger and Prophet was Muhammad who was given the *Qur'an*. He completed the chain of prophets and, thus, sealed the succession. The Qur'an and his teachings are preserved for humanity until the end of time.

10: 47; 26: 162-163; 4: 59; 3: 31; 4: 165; 6: 42-45, 48-49;
53: 36-55; 87: 18-19; 5: 44-49, 68; 4: 163-165

The Last Day – the Hereafter

Life on this earth is transitory. It is a period of trial to determine who follows the guidance sent by Allah. Man will be accountable before his Lord for his deeds in this world.

One day, a great calamity will come about and create upheaval on this earth. All people will be raised again and brought before Allah, Who will judge their deeds; for good deeds they will be rewarded and for bad deeds they will be punished.

The Hereafter includes the following stages:

The Hour is the appointed time of which no one has any knowledge except Allah. This will be heralded by the sound of the Trumpet. When the Trumpet is blown that will be the Hour, which is most grievous and most bitter and whose warning has been given. The sky will be rent asunder, the grip holding it together having been loosened, the sun shall be folded up, the stars shall scatter away, the earth and the mountains will be carried aloft and be crushed to bits at one stroke, and the seas shall burst forth. Many graphic words are used to depict the horror and calamity of this Day. Some of these words are: the Calamity, the Earthquake, the Blast, the Hard Day, the Encompassing Day, the Day of Separation, the Great Disaster, the Reality, the Day of Judgement, the *Inevitable* Day, the Day of Reckoning, the Day of Exodus from the graves.

With the second blast of the Trumpet, all graves will be laid open and souls will be rejoined with their bodies, and the scrolls of men's deeds will be unfolded and everyone will know all his deeds.

When the third blast of the Trumpet is blown this is the time of resurrection. The angels will stand on the sides, with eight of them bearing aloft the Throne of your Lord. Then humanity in its entirety

will stand up for accountability of their deeds before their Creator and no secret of anyone's will remain hidden.

The final result will separate people. Those who are successful will attain an everlasting life of pleasure in Paradise. Those who are doomed will live in eternal damnation in Hell.

67: 1-2; 79: 42-44; 43: 85; 54: 1, 46; 50: 42; 22: 1-2;
56: 1-56; 78: 17-40; 81: 1-14; 82: 1-19

Proof of the Hereafter

Just as the dead land is brought back to life with water, such shall be the rising of dead human beings from earth.

The presence of conscience in human beings presupposes that one can instinctively distinguish between right and wrong.

As Allah was able to create not only human beings but the whole universe in the first place why should it be difficult for Him to recreate them.

50: 11; 29: 20; 22: 5-7; 75: 1-4

29 The Shari'ah: the Code of Conduct

This day I have perfected for you your religion, and have bestowed upon you My Bounty in full measure, and have been pleased to assign for you Islam as your religion. Follow, then, the lawful and unlawful bounds enjoined upon you.

Strive in the cause of Allah in a manner worthy of that striving. He has chosen you for His task, and He has not laid upon you any hardship in religion. Keep to the faith of your father Abraham. It is Allah Who named you Muslims in the earlier Scriptures and even in this Book. We have appointed you to be the community of the middle way so that you should be witnesses to all mankind as the Messenger is witness to you. Thus, you are now the best nation brought forth for mankind. You command what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah.

5: 4; 22: 78; 2: 143; 3: 110

Basic Duties

Your Lord has decreed that you shall serve none but Him. The Sovereignty of Allah demands that His Rules and Commands be enforced upon the entire universe, including mankind. One is required to live in submission to His Rule and to His Will.

17: 22; 12: 40

Establish Prayers to remember Me. This restrains one from shameful and unjust deeds. Prayers must be preceded by ablutions and intentions, facing the direction of Mecca. *Each prayer has two, three or four cycles, each containing the various motions of standing up, bowing down and prostrating and sitting down. Some parts of the Qur'an are recited while standing and phrases praising Allah in other*

postures. Friday Prayer performed after mid-day has special significance as it is preceded by a sermon. It is obligatory for all adult males and after the call to Prayer is made all activities must cease until the Prayers are concluded.

The times of the obligatory prayers are at dawn, after mid-day, late afternoon, after sunset and late evening.

20: 14; 29: 45; 5: 6; 11: 114; 17: 78-79; 62: 9

Dispense obligatory almsgiving to the poor and needy, those who are debt-ridden and those recently reconciled to the Truth as well as for all good deeds. Those employed to administer the fund can be paid from this. Regular charity should be paid to the above as well as to the wayfarer and to those who ask for help as there is a recognised right for them to share in your wealth and possessions. You should spend in charity whatever is surplus to your needs.

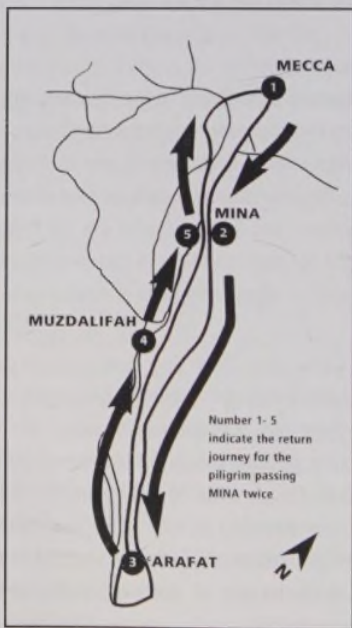
9: 60, 103; 21: 73; 2: 271, 273-4, 277

Fasting is prescribed during the month of Ramadan so that you may become God-conscious. It requires refraining from food, drink and sexual intercourse during the day. This abstinence is from dawn until sunset and all adults are required to observe the fast. Women who are pregnant, menstruating as well as nursing mothers and those suffering ill-health or travelling are exempt from this obligation. Those who are chronically ill and are unable to fast must pay compensation by feeding one person per day. Celebrate the end of the fasting month by a Day of Feast in praising Allah, performing Prayers and dispensing charity.

2: 183-187

Perform the pilgrimage to Mecca once in one's lifetime in the prescribed month if one can afford it and is fit to undertake the journey. One should take provisions for the pilgrimage, but the best provision is piety.

Movement during the HAJJ



Pilgrims are required to wear a pair of unstitched white sheets of cloth, thus eliminating all differences of culture, race, class, nationality and age. Rites of Hajj symbolically re-enact many of the

events in the lives of Abraham and his wife Hagar and their son Ishmael. The Hajj ceremonies start on the 8th day of the last month of the lunar calendar by walking round the Ka'bah seven times. This is followed by a swift walk between the hillocks of Safa and Marwah, which are now incorporated in the Grand Mosque. Pilgrims then proceed to Mina about seven miles from Mecca. After an overnight stay there, they move to Arafat the following day and spend the whole day in prayers and supplications, returning after sunset for a stop over in Muzdalifah for the night and finally back to Mina for performing the rest of the rites, such as the sacrifice of an animal, shaving or clipping of hairs, stoning at three pillars and performing another circumambulation of the Ka'bah. The Hajj ceremonies finish within the next two days.

2: 189, 196; 3: 97; 9: 3; 22: 26-34

Commanding good and forbidding evil is one of the most important injunctions imposed on an individual Muslim as well as the Muslim community as a whole. Muslims are required to actively get involved in the social betterment of the society in which they live.

They should encourage and participate in good deeds and check and stop disagreeable, objectionable and detestable acts if possible physically otherwise by condemning them verbally. If one is not in a position to do either than at least abhorrence should be felt in one's heart.

3: 104, 114; 7: 157; 9: 71

30 Real Piety

The purpose of all acts of worship is to create God-consciousness and piety. Belief and commitment to Allah cannot be discharged by merely turning toward the east or west. True faith goes beyond a few rituals, rather it encompasses morality and compassion for others.

Righteous is one who believes in Allah and the Last Day, the angels, the Scripture and the prophets. One who gives one's wealth in charity for love of Allah, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask for help. One who also observes proper worship and pays the poor-due as well as being faithful to the promise once made and remaining firm and patient in pain and adversity, and times of conflict. Such a person is really truthful and righteous.

2: 177

31 Characteristics of Believers

The believers are those who are constant in their prayers with humility. They avoid vain talk, restrain their anger and forgive others. They are active in charitable deeds both in affluence and hardship and recognize that there is a right in their wealth for the poor and dispossessed. They strictly guard their chastity and lead a pious life. They faithfully observe their trusts and covenants, and are upright in their testimonies and do not bear false witness. They are humble and walk on the earth gently; they ignore the belligerent and pass by frivolity with dignity. They are neither extravagant nor niggardly in their spending. Even when they commit any indecency or sin, they instantly seek the forgiveness of their Lord.

The believers, both men and women, are allies of one another. They enjoin good, and forbid evil. They are obedient, truthful, steadfast, humble and charitable.

23: 1-10; 70: 22-35; 25: 63-77; 17: 23-37; 9: 112; 33: 35

32 Characteristics of Hypocrites

Hypocrites, both men and women, are all alike. They command what is evil, and forbid what is good and withhold their hands from doing good.

Hypocrites claim that they believe in Allah and in the Last Day yet, in fact, they are not true believers. There is a disease of hypocrisy in their hearts. When they meet the believers, they try to fool them by pretending to be believers and when they meet their evil companions they become their allies. They lie, bear false witness and shelter behind their oaths and, thus, hinder themselves and others from the path of truth. Outwardly, they look elegant and classy, but in reality they are rotten to the core. They create mischief and disruption yet claim that they are the peace-makers. They try to delude Allah but in fact they delude themselves. When they rise to prayers they rise very reluctantly and to show off. In fact, they are heedless of their prayers. They dangle between faith and disbelief and fully belong to neither. They enjoin evil and forbid what is good and disregard Allah. They are really wicked people. Hence their punishment is that they will be in the lowest depths of the Hell-fire.

9: 67; 2: 8-20; 63: 1-8; 4: 142-143; 9: 67-69, 73-87; 57: 13-15

33 Inter-Human Relations

The Unity of Mankind

Be conscious of your Lord Who created mankind from a single being and out of it created its mate; out of the two spread many men and women. He then made them into nations and tribes with a diversity of tongues and colours so that they may know one another. Verily the noblest among men in the sight of Allah is the most God-fearing person. This does not warrant a people of any particular colour, race or nationality to regard themselves as superior to others. Allah created such diversities to foster greater cooperation and to enable these different entities to become mutually introduced. Only moral excellence is the basis for superiority.

4: 1; 49: 13

Ummah (People)

All the messengers brought the same message from Allah, and all those who accepted this message constituted the *ummah* of the messenger. They followed him in his teachings even after his death. Before the advent of Muhammad, the Israelites were the *ummah* entrusted to convey Allah's message to all mankind. As they failed in this duty, the Muslim Ummah was then given this honour. This was signified by the change of direction of people's Prayers from Jerusalem to Mecca. After mentioning this change of direction, Allah says: "Thus have We made of you an Ummah justly balanced, that you might be a witness over the nations and the Messenger a witness over yourselves."

Thus, the Muslims are a median community, avoiding all extravagances of excess and neglect and who remain sober and moderate; establish justice and equity, and lead the whole of mankind to the middle path of justice and peace.

To signify this role, Allah said, "You are the best of people evolved for mankind, commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong." This is the same honour that had previously been accorded the Israelites.

2: 142-143; 3: 110

34 Jihad

In essence the many forms of the duty of *Jihad* is that it embraces the struggle, endeavour, effort and striving involved in accomplishing a task. Jihad is not any struggle but it is rather a struggle in Allah's cause. In one form it expresses the personal struggle against one's own desires, aspirations, passions, likes and dislikes. In another it could be against the evils which plague society. Another form of Jihad is intellectual, in terms of the exercise to propagate Islamic ideology. It is undertaken with sincerity and wholeheartedness so that it can reach the recipient's heart. Overall all such deeds are performed with sincerity to seek Allah's pleasure and not for any other motive.

In relation to armed struggle terms other than Jihad are used such as *Qital* (fighting, combat) and *Harb* (war). Armed struggle is only to be waged to overcome the forces of evil. Before arms are taken up all other peaceful efforts must have been exhausted and many other conditions have to be fulfilled.

64: 14-15; 41: 33-36; 16: 126; 49: 15; 61: 10-11; 29: 2-7

35 Family and Society

The Lord has decreed that you should be good to your parents; and should both or any one of them attain old age, you should not utter a harsh word to them, but speak to them with respect, and be humble to them saying, "Lord, show mercy to them as they nurtured me when I was small." However, if they exert pressure on you to associate other deities or persons with Allah do not obey them.

You may marry such women as may seem good to you but who are not from the prohibited category, i.e. being from a very close relation, with the permission of their guardian and give them their bridal due in fair manner. You are allowed to have up to four wives on condition that you treat each of them with equity and fairness otherwise you should remain content with only one.

Allah has created love and mercy between the spouses so that you reflect on His signs. You should preserve the sanctity of marriage and do not even approach fornication for it is an outrageous act, and an evil act. If there is a split between the couple let both families resort to arbitration. If this does not work then there is a provision of divorce in cases of the complete breakdown of marriage.

There is a share for men and women in what their parents and kinsfolk have left behind – be it little or much. Allah has ordained a specific share for each relative. But if at the time of division of inheritance other relatives, orphans or poor are present give them something of it. Take proper care of the property of the orphans and give it back to them when they attain maturity.

17: 23-24; 29: 8; 31: 14-15; 4: 3-4, 35, 129; 30: 21;
2: 227, 229-237; 33: 49; 65: 1-7; 4: 2, 7-12, 176

36 Social Etiquette

Do not enter other people's houses until you have obtained permission. If you are told to leave then do so. This is the purer way for you. Even children and servants should not enter bedrooms without prior permission. If you are allowed to enter, then greet those inside with peace. Speak kindly to people and be kind and good to your neighbour, who may be your kin or may be a stranger, to your friend or your fellow-traveller, and to the wayfarer, and to your subordinates. Do not contemptuously turn your face away from people, nor tread haughtily upon earth. Allah does not love the arrogant boaster.

Be moderate in your stride and lower your voice. Do not strut about in the land arrogantly. Be moderate in your spending. Do not be tight-fisted or a spendthrift. Do not be miserly, bid others to be the same, nor should you give in charity to make a show of it to people. Do not laugh and make fun of others as they may be better than you. Do not taunt one another, nor revile one another by nicknames. Avoid being excessively suspicious as some suspicion is sinful. Do not spy, nor backbite one another. If two parties happen to fight, make peace between them with justice, and be equitable for Allah loves the equitable.

24: 27-29, 58-59; 2: 83; 4: 36; 17: 26-37; 31: 18-19; 49: 11-12

37 The State

Blessed is Allah in Whose hand is sovereignty and He has power over everything. He has appointed man as His representative on earth. Therefore, you should rule among people with justice and do not follow your desires lest it should lead you astray from Allah's path. Obey Allah and His Messenger, and those invested with authority among you; and then if you were to dispute among yourselves about anything refer it to the Book of Allah and the practice of the Messenger.

Allah commands you to appoint people to offices of trust who are worthy to rule over you. These are people who are endowed with intellectual and physical capacities as well as with skilful competency. Conduct your affairs by mutual consultation in matters of importance and when you are resolved on a course of action follow it and put your trust in Allah. When you gain authority in the land you should establish regular Prayers and manage regular almsgiving, command what is right and forbid what is wrong. So follow whatever has been sent down to you by your Lord and do not cross the limits prescribed by Him. You have no choice in matters that have been decided by Allah and His Messenger.

67: 1; 2: 30; 4: 58-59, 83, 105; 5: 42;

16: 90; 42: 38; 22: 41; 33: 36

38 Laws of War and Justice

War

Permission to fight is granted to those who have been wronged. So fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you; but do not transgress, for Allah does not love transgressors. Fight them whenever you confront them and drive them out (of Mecca) from where they drove you out. For though killing is sinful, wrongful persecution is even worse than killing. Do not fight against them near the Holy Mosque unless they fight against you; but if they fight against you then retaliate. Keep on fighting against them until mischief ends and the way prescribed by Allah prevails. But if they desist, then know that hostility is directed only against the wrongdoers.

You should also fight against the oppressors in support of helpless people and protect them and be their helpers.

If there are any prisoners of war, you are entitled to set them free as an act of grace or against ransom. If your enemies are inclined to peace, then make peace and trust Allah. In case they deceive you, Allah is sufficient for you. Fulfil your commitments and pledges and as long as others act straightforwardly, you must also reciprocate.

You should be kind and just to those who did not fight against you on account of your religion and who did not drive you out of your homes.

22: 39; 2: 190-194; 4: 75-76; 60: 8; 61: 4

Justice

The entire universe is finely balanced and based on justice, so do not upset the balance. Indeed, Allah sent His Messengers with evident truth and Scriptures embodying the criteria of right and wrong in order to uphold justice. Hence, Allah commands you to do justice when you judge between people. Establish justice, be witness to truth for the sake of Allah, even though it may be against yourselves or against your parents and kinsmen, or the rich or the poor. Allah's claim takes precedence over either, and follow not your own desires lest you swerve from justice.

Never let your enmity for people who have barred you from the Holy Mosque move you to commit any excess against them. Rather, help one another in acts of righteousness and piety, and do not help one another in sin and injustice. Do not let the enmity of any people move you to deviate from justice. Act justly, that is nearer to being God-fearing.

Do not take false cases to the courts in order to usurp other's property. Do not commit perjury or give false evidence. Do not kill any person or inflict any injury. Anyone who has been wronged, or his heirs, has the right to receive retribution. Allah has prescribed limits in all matters, so do not cross over them. Do not kill your children for fear of want as Allah provides for them and surely killing is a great sin.

55: 7-9; 57: 25; 4: 58, 135; 5: 2, 8; 2: 178, 188, 283; 5: 106; 17: 31

39 Economic Life

It is Allah Who has distributed your livelihood among yourselves in this world. He has raised some above others in ranks that some of you may harness others to your service.

Do not usurp one another's possessions by false means. All transactions should be through trading by mutual consent. Allah has made buying and selling lawful and taking interest unlawful. Hence, do not take interest, doubled and redoubled. Whenever a contract is entered into it should be committed in writing and witnessed by reliable people.

By prescribing almsgiving and the distribution of assets by inheritance, wealth remains in circulation and does not concentrate itself in the hands of a few rich people.

Do not squander your wealth wastefully nor be tight-fisted. And fulfil the covenant, for you will be called to account regarding that covenant. Give full measure when you measure, and weigh with even scales. That is fair and better in consequence.

Gambling, games of chance and divining arrows are all abominations; they are the handiwork of Satan, so turn wholly away from them.

6: 165; 2: 188, 219, 275-280, 283; 3: 130-133; 59: 7; 5: 90-91; 17: 26-30

40 Food and Farming

It is your Lord Who has sent down water from the heavens, out of which you drink and out of which you grow the grains, plants and all kinds of fruit on which you feed yourselves and pasture your cattle so pay your Lord's due on the day of harvesting.

He created the cattle. They are a source of clothing and food and also a variety of other benefits for you. And you find beauty in them as you drive them to pasture in the morning and as you drive them back home in the evening.

He created different kinds of animals and made them subservient to you. They carry your loads to many a place, which you would be unable to reach without much hardship. And He created horses and mules and asses for you to ride, and also for your adornment. And He created many things for you that you do not even know about. And it is your Lord Who has subjected the sea that you may eat fresh fish from it and bring forth ornaments from it that you can wear. And you see ships ploughing their course through it so that you may go forth seeking His Bounty and be grateful to Him.

6: 99, 141; 27: 60-61; 16: 5-14

41 Dietary Rules

Eat whatever is upon the earth that is lawful and wholesome and do not hold as unlawful the good things which Allah has made lawful. Allah has forbidden you only intoxicants, carrion, blood and the flesh of swine; also any animal over which the name of any other than Allah has been pronounced as well as any animal killed by a beast of prey or that has died of natural causes. But whoever eats of them under compelling necessity – neither desiring it nor exceeding the limit of absolute necessity – surely for such action Allah is Much Forgiving, Most Merciful.

2: 172; 5: 3, 90

42 Inter-Faith Relations

There is no compulsion in religion. The right way stands clearly distinguished from the wrong. Now let him who will, believe; and let him who will, disbelieve.

For each of you Allah has appointed a Law and a way of life. And had Allah so willed, He would surely have made you one single community; instead, He gave each of you a Law and a way of life in order to test you by what He gave you. Vie, then, with one another in good works. Unto Allah is the return of all of you; and He will then make you understand the truth concerning those matters on which you disagreed.

O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you; that we shall serve none but Allah and shall associate none with Him in His Divinity and that some of us will not take others as lords other than Allah. And if they turn away from accepting this call, tell them, "Bear witness that we are the ones who have submitted ourselves exclusively to Allah."

O People of the Book! Why do you dispute with us about Abraham even though the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed until after his time? Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian; he was a Muslim, wholly devoted to Allah. And he certainly was not amongst the polytheists. Surely the people who have the best claim to affiliation with Abraham are those who followed him in the past, and presently this Prophet and those who believe in him.

O People of the Book! Do not exceed the proper limits in your religion at the cost of truth, and do not follow the vain desires of the people who strayed before, and caused others to go astray, and strayed far away from the right path.

Of all people you will find the Jews and those who associate others with Allah in His divinity to be the most hostile to those who believe and you will surely find that the Christians are closest to feeling affection for those who believe. This is because there are priests and monks among them, and because they are not arrogant. And when they hear what has been revealed to the Messenger you see that their eyes overflow with tears because of the truth that they recognize and they say, "Our Lord! We do believe; write us down, therefore, with those who bear witness to the Truth. And why should we not believe in Allah and the truth which has come down to us when we do fervently desire that our Lord should include us among the righteous?"

2: 256; 5: 48, 77, 82-84; 3: 64-65

43 Epilogue

O Mankind! Now there has come to you an exhortation from your Lord, healing for the ailments of hearts, and guidance for those who believe. Tell them. O Prophet, "Let them rejoice in the Lord's Grace and Mercy through this Book which is bestowed on you."

My mercy encompasses everything. I will show mercy to those who abstain from evil.

Tell them O Prophet, "My servants, who have committed excesses against themselves, do not despair of Allah's mercy. Surely Allah forgives all sins. He is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful."

As the Qur'an starts with prayer it also ends with prayers seeking Allah's refuge in safeguarding its Message.

I seek refuge with the Lord of mankind, King of mankind and True God of mankind from all the evil that is created and from the evil of magic and sorcery. I also seek refuge from the envy, mischief and whisperings of people both jinns and humans who constantly prompt our hearts.

10: 57-58; 7: 156; 39: 53; 113: 1-5; 114: 1-6



Simone Denney

The Qur'an is so precious to Muslims that many are able to recite it from beginning to end. Yet for people outside Islam it is a closed book. Based on a template introduced by Shah Wali Allah in the mid-18th century this book seeks to bridge that divide. The depth of the Qur'an's guidance becomes available to all. You may be surprised to read about many of the historical characters you will also find in the Christian and Jewish Bibles. For Muslims this book may reveal new insights into the Qur'an.